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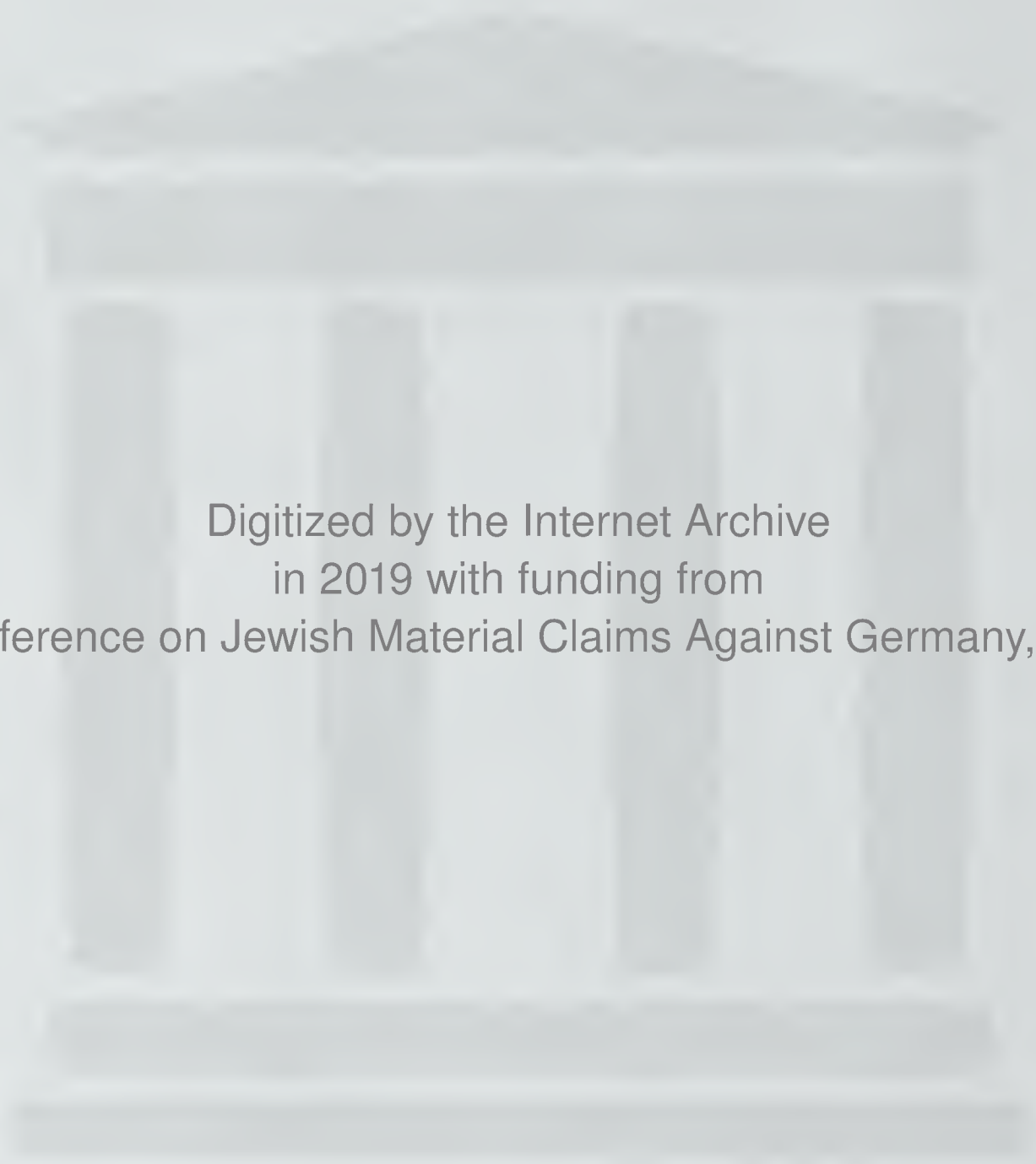


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I LIVED TO TELL



A True Story

By
Bernard Raab

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FORWARD

This biography of my life is dedicated to my family... my wife Eva; my son, Melech Yakov, his wife Jan, and their children Lauren, and Matthew; to my daughter, Gitel Bluma, her husband Yossi and their daughter, Dina. This life story helps to perpetuate the memory of my parents, Melech and Bluma Raab, and my brothers Chaim Moshe and Avraham Yakov Raab, may they all be our protectors and may they rest in peace. They gave their lives for Yiddishkeit and died Al Kiddush Hashem.

I would also like to thank my whole family for tolerating me and showing me understanding and patience while I compiled this biography. It was not easy for me as it brought back memories that people like myself are trying to forget. I have resisted all these years but I was told that I have an obligation to my family to document my life story. Maybe others will also read it and this may help to prevent the most horrible events herein described from ever happening again. I survived these 5 years of hard labor and starvation: I am convinced that miracles do happen.

With tears in my eyes I remain,

Bernie Raab

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EMIL WITH HIS WIFE BERTA AND SONS, MORRIS, ROMEK AND BENUSH RAAB



BENUSH RAAB



ROMEK RAAB - BROTHER



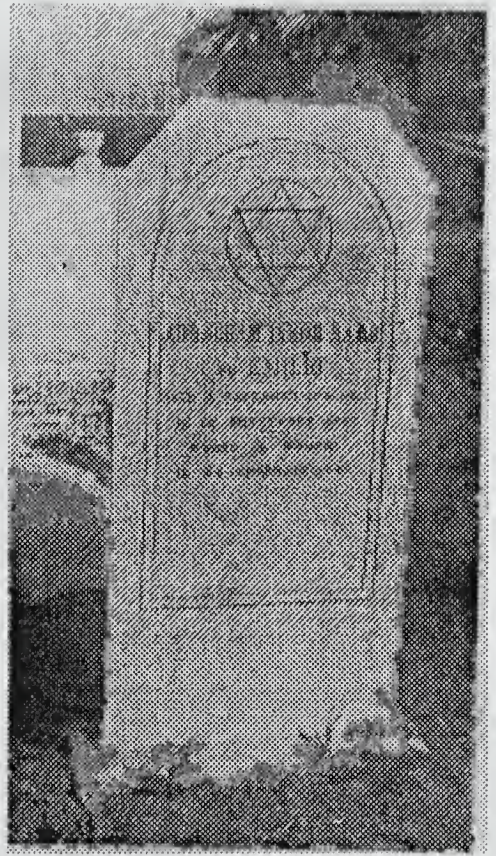
MORRIS RAAB - BROTHER



ROMEK RAAB



ROMEK AND BENUSH RAAB



BERNIE, EVA AND FRIENDS



GISELLE AND MEL RAAB



BERNIE AND EVA WITH THEIR FAMILY

BIOGRAPHY OF DOV BEN MELECH TURTELTAUB RAAB

My name is Dov Ben Melech Turteltaub-Raab. I was born in 1923 in a small town in Poland near the German border by the name of Szczakowa. My father, Melech Turteltaub Raab, was born in a small farm village near Lvov. It appears that Lvov is the same city as present day Lviv which is in the most Western part of Ukraine. His parents were farmers but when he was young he was called up to military service and afterwards he chose not to return to farming but to try his luck in other interests. My paternal grandmother's maiden name was Turteltaub but Jewish marriages were not recognized in Poland so my father had his mother's name, Turteltaub. He eventually migrated from Lvov to Szczakowa in 1910.

Melech was a bachelor approximately 38 years young when he met my mother. Bluma Fischer was about 19 years old at the time and very beautiful. She had no father and was very poor with no dowry. The rule at the time was that a girl came with a dowry and if she did not have one, she would

have to settle for less than the best. My father offered to marry my mother as he did not care about her being poor. All he knew was that she was beautiful. There was some hesitation on my grandmother's part though. After all, my father was a stranger in town. But, she was a very smart lady, rest her soul, and she knew that this was the best that she could do for her daughter. This happened to be one of the best marriages of my grandmother's children. My mother had previously been matched to one of her cousins who was very rich and influential but since she was poor, the shiduch did not materialize. Our mother told us about this shiduch and my brothers told her that they could not be happier to have such a good father and mother. She said that for her part, she could not have asked for a better husband. There was never any jealousy amongst us for material goods. We had a very happy home.

My parents lived very happily together. My father decided to go back to Lvov where he became Chief of Police. My 2 older brothers were born, one in 1912 and one in 1913. In the meantime World War I broke out in 1914 and lasted until 1918. The Polish government declared amnesty to

all the criminals and political prisoners. My father's life was threatened and he had to run from Lvov. So, the whole family went back to Szczakowa. It did not take long and my father got a job with the government working for the post office in Jaworzno, 6 km from Szczakowa. Jaworzno was a city of approximately 30,000 people and approximately 250 Jewish families. He was issued a jeep and he commuted every day and since there was no railroad station in Jaworzno, he transported the mail as well. He studied very hard and kept advancing regularly on his job until he became the head of the office with rank of postmaster. He was a quiet and smart man and this made him very likable. My parents were now doing well. In 1923 my mother bore another son, me. My parents were struggling in Szczakowa but after I was born, things started to look up. My mother said that I brought them luck. Who was I to argue?

My father never talked about his parents or the immediate family. My mother had many sisters and was very personable so there was no shortage of relatives from that side. My widowed grandmother eventually remarried but divorced not long after.

Then, she came to live with us until she died when I was a child of about 7 or 8 years old.

My father was a very good provider and also a very good father. Father was an easygoing person. He did not get angry at his wife or at his children. He was occasionally stubborn but never allowed that to affect his family. He didn't punish his children but would sometimes give us that "unhappy look". That was enough and sometimes it was worse than a beating would have been.

I don't know any parents who would do more for their children than mine did. We had a sweet store where they sold candy and all kinds of cakes. My father opened up an account for me where I could buy anything I wished and charge it. He hired a tutor for me to help me with my school homework. He also hired a violin teacher to give me violin lessons for 1 hour every day. Unfortunately, I would pay more attention to my soccer game than to any of my studies.

LIFE IN SZCZAKOWA, POLAND

Szczakowa was a town in which the approximately 6,000 Polish inhabitants considered themselves adopted Germans living under Polish occupation. According to Polish standards, Szczakowa was a highly industrial city with one of the largest cement manufacturing factories in Poland. It also had a large glass factory and a ladder factory and was surrounded by coal mines. It was quite a prosperous little town.

We had approximately 100 Jewish families. We did not live in a ghetto but rather in one section where most of the people were Jewish. About 25% of the people in this section were Gentile. We had a very nice house that was remodeled in 1933. There were 3 bedrooms and a large kitchen with new built in ovens. The kitchen was twice as big as the kitchen where I live now and the room that my parents slept in was about 500 square feet. The upstairs of the house was occupied by one tenant in a small space. The rest of the upstairs was the attic in which we dried the wash during the Winter. The clothes would come down stiff at the end of the day. In the Summer we would dry corn, fava beans and other vegetables from the garden. By Polish standards this style of living was very modern.

My personal life was not bad at all. Although there was not much free time for myself, my schedule was hectic but good. I attended 7 years of elementary school. I had a heavy curriculum. I woke up at 6:30 a.m. to be at the synagogue for prayers. I came home, ate breakfast and was in school not later than 8:00 a.m. I attended elementary school from 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 P.M. I went home, had dinner and had to go to cheder from 2:00 p.m. to 6:00 p.m. Then, I had 1 hour of violin lessons and 1 hour of tutoring. Then, I did my homework. In the summer, on Sunday afternoons, we would go to the forest or to the river where we would have a picnic, play soccer, or roll in the warm sand. The best part was that I did not have to study or go to cheder.

After elementary school I went to Yeshiva and professional trade school. From 8:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. I was in Yeshiva. I attended Yeshiva for 2 years. For one year I attended Szczakowa Yeshiva. The next year I attended the Radomsko Yeshiva in Sosnowiec which was 9 km away. I traveled every morning by train, which took approximately 20 to 25 minutes. I sometimes would have to change

trains in Szopienice. At that station there were Silesian gangs who were looking for Jews to beat up. Most of the time I would hide in the toilet while waiting for the train.

There was another way to go which was safer. If I was not running late, I could take a train that had a stop over in Karzimierz. This train was very slow. There was a joke going around about this old Polish lady walking to Karzmierz. The engineer offered her a free ride. She said, "No thanks, I have no time!"

During the 2 year period that I attended Yeshiva, I also went to trade school from 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. After that I went back to Szczakowa Yeshiva until 7:00 p.m. Luckily it took me less than 10 minutes to go to each school. I was enrolled for the third year of professional trade school when things started to change. World War II broke out and this stopped all my education. If not for the war, I probably would have been well-educated and have moved from Szczakowa after growing up. The future there, if you were a Jew, was limited. You could not work in any of the factories. The most

you could hope for was to be a peddler, a grocery salesman or take over your parents' store.

I feel that in some ways I let my parents down. Firstly, my mother made no secret about being disappointed that I came out a boy and not a girl. Sometimes in anger my mother would tell me this. It didn't make me feel very good especially as I got older. I was a substitute girl. I had to polish and wax the floors and beat the dust out of the rugs. It was hard to be her "girl" and still be a boy.

Also my parents wanted me to excel at my studies and become either a doctor or a lawyer. I just could not perform well at my studies even though I worked very hard. Although I was their last hope of all of their children to become a professional, it did not look like that would happen. They were loving enough not to show their feelings but my conscience bothered me. Sometimes I felt like talking to them and asking them to relieve some of the pressure from me but I did not want to hurt their feelings or let them down.

When I was about 7 years old I was playing soccer in the cheder yard and I fell and broke a leg.

There was no orthopedist in Szczakowa so my mother had to take me to Krakow, approximately 50 kilometers away. They put a cast on me with a wire guard which weighed more than I did. We stayed there for about 1 week. My uncle and aunt were rich but even so the bed had bugs in it and they bit me all over. Even though I was immobilized and had to stay in bed, I still liked being in the city.

I was with my uncle and aunt but they looked down on us. They called us small town people. Nobody in my immediate family liked to visit them. My oldest brother served with the Polish engineers in Krakow but during his 2 year term he only visited them once. Also, their children were just as snobbish as their parents were. I was glad to go home but since crutches had not yet arrived in Poland, I had to stay in bed for several more weeks.

My parents went out of the way to make my life pleasant. I had my own special set of colorful dishes, ice skates, a sled and almost anything that I could imagine. The only condition was that I get good grades. I had a birthday party every year which was usually celebrated on the closest shabbat. After lunch, a bunch of my friends from cheder

came over to my house. Mother prepared a mixture of nuts and raisins. She also baked cookies and cakes. We sang and danced for a while. Afterwards we all went back to shul. My Bar Mitzvah was no different. I read the haftorah in shul (that was what the Bar Mitzvah boy usually did) and then we all went to my home and had a little party. I still had to do my usual chores like go to the bakery to pick up the cholent or help my mother wash the dishes. I was the youngest and did not earn my keep so I had to help out around the house.

Everybody in my family worked very hard in order to make a little better living. Father left early in the morning and came home between 8:00- 9:00 p.m. He was a sincere and honest man and never complained. Neither did my mother, who had her hands full. She would cook, bake, clean, etc. all without complaining. She did everything she could out of love to make it easier for Father. I personally could not wait to grow up and leave for the unknown. I thought about leaving Szczakowa all of the time. The fact is that I never felt at ease or welcome in Szczakowa. I attributed this to the attitude toward Jews of the Polish people. I grew up

with fear of the Polish Gentiles despite my father's attitude which was to the contrary.

My father, rest his soul, worked for the Polish government. He was a mailman in the city of Jaworzno, 6 kilometers away, and received many decorations. The majority of this town consisted of retired coal miners. Since we did not have any banks, no checks were written. All of the retired and active miners were getting their pensions and salaries paid by cash. My father was the carrier of that money from 1918 until he was forced to retire in 1933. The coal miners seemed to like my father very much and they were generous with their tips.

In early 1931 my father was elevated to the rank of Postmaster of Jaworzno. He was the only Jew in the whole country to hold this rank. He was assigned a small jeep which took him and brought him back to Jaworzno. Due to the fact that he carried large amounts of money on him, he had to carry a gun, which he never had to use. Personally, we thought he would not know how to use it if he had to. The gun on his belt served the same purpose as a scarecrow in the fields.

It just so happened that there was one incident when my father was serving in Jaworzno. He usually parked the jeep at the post office, picked up his letter sack with money in it and went to shul to daven. One morning he hung the sack on a hanger and involved himself in davening, trusting that nobody would dare steal something in shul. He happened to be wrong. It just so happened that on this particular morning he had a foreign check in his bag. When he came back after davening he noticed that the check was missing. He talked to the Rabbi to announce this on the Bima. Some men told him that Mr. So and So was seen looking in his bag. Mr. So and So confessed to stealing the check, which he immediately returned. The Rabbi was a close friend of my father's and asked him not to press charges. Father listened to the Rabbi but out of this incident he learned not to leave valuable things laying around to tempt people.

My father was supposed to take an office job after he was awarded postmaster rank but he refused. The miners were getting paid twice a month and he distributed thousands of cash payments. As I said before, most of the miners gave him tips and some months the tips exceeded his

salary. At Christmas time he got additional tips. He had a long coat with big pockets and when he came home his coat would weigh a ton. I remember the government issued special little booklets with funny little cartoons about the mailman, which he distributed with the pension. For this the minors gave additional tips. I remember my mother enjoyed helping him take off the coat.

It was not easy to give up such a position so he traded the office glory and continued the outside delivery job until he retired. This was not always easy. There was rain, blowing snow, and temperatures between 20 and 30 degrees below zero in the Winter. After retirement he got a job administering apartment houses that the government had repossessed. It was a supplementary income, mostly office work. He had to collect the rent, hire people to do minor repairs, and write reports to the government. My mother helped him in this endeavor. Mother was very smart and encouraged Father to socialize with his supervisors. Mother represented Father with dignity and sophistication.

When he was not busy with his work, my father spent a lot of time in the Beit Midrash

studying and praying. He had his own seat with a stand for his prayer books. He was seated right next to the Cantor and the Rabbi. He spent a lot of time with the Rabbi and heard a lot of dvar torahs, some of which he shared with my mother. My father had a satisfied look on his face when he came home from shul.

My mother, unlike my father who minded his own business, liked to gossip with the neighbors. Most of the gossip went on during Passover. The regular bakeries were closed so the ladies needed a place to bake their sponge cakes. It so happened that my mother had 2 modern stoves with large ovens special fit with Passover linings. Every day after lunch we had between 15 and 20 ladies waiting in line to bake their cakes. For some reason, my parents did not mind. Some days they would lock themselves up in their room or my father would go to shul. For the rest of the afternoon, my mother cooked or sat around and absorbed the "news". Sometimes I stayed around to listen but I was too young for most of it and would get bored quickly. I either stayed with my friends or went to shul with my father.

My father made a nice living for his family. We had everything we needed, in moderation. The Polish government had a rule at the time that you had to retire at age 60 or after 39 years of service. In 1933 Father was 63 years old and had 39 years of service. His coworkers could not stomach a Jew to have such a high ranking job and for all these reasons, my father was forced to retire. He received full pay from the Polish government. Father received several awards from the Polish government, including personal letters from President Moscicki, that his children would have priority to any government job that they desired. My father was a devout Jew and Pole. As the saying goes, among most of the Polish people that he came in contact said that he was a good Jew and all of the others were crooks.

We got along well with our immediate Gentile neighbors. At Easter time we gave them matzoth and they gave us cakes. Since we could not eat it we had to dispose of it without embarrassing anybody. We used to hide it in the attic, which was full of these cakes. At Christmas time we gave them a home-baked twisted challa with a carp. Things were not like that after the war broke out. It sure

looked like the Polish people were waiting for this occasion, especially in Upper Silesia, which is where we lived.

Basically, it seemed that everybody in Szczakowa made some kind of a living. There were some poor families. Somebody always helped them. My mother always had some reserve money. Some of the merchants used to come to borrow money which they always paid back. By the way she never charged any interest. My mother knew what it was to be poor. Both my parents gave *tzdaka* but very quietly. My father enjoyed watching my mother conducting business. She kept her money in a sack behind the commode which nobody touched. My parents were very good-hearted people and were well-liked by Szczakowa Jews and non-Jews.

The greatest past time in Szczakowa was going to the central train station and watching the people arriving. Sometimes I would see a friendly face and be able to talk to somebody new. For diversion, we would do a little ice skating in a frozen pond, sled in the snow or hire Anshel's horse and carriage with a sled and go on an outing. Normally there would be 30-40 participants in this activity.

Some would be on skis, skates, or on small sleds. We and the horse would walk to a nearby little town which was up a hill, approximately 8-10 kilometers. Then we would all attach ourselves to the sled and slide down the solid snow. This horse was not very well fed and was barely alive. He only got potato peels to eat. One time we were on one of these outings and the horse just lay down in the snow and would not go. We loaded him up and slid him down the hill on the sled. This was all lots of fun.

On the outskirts of town was a cement factory. The laborers lived there and there was a government-run clinic with nurses. Anybody could go to the clinic for a minimal charge. There was also a public bath and for approximately \$1.00 you could take a shower. My brothers and me used to go there once a month. It took over half an hour to get there on foot. We also had a mikveh and me and my father went every Friday. My father bought a bucket of warm water and both of us washed with it. Also, once a month, mother conducted the laundry washing. This was a huge project. We had to boil big kettles of water. The water had to be carried in from the center of town by hand as there was no indoor plumbing. It took 2 or 3 days to finish.

After it was finished we had a metal portable tub and everybody took a bath, mainly me and my parents. That was considered good living. Hygiene facilities were very rare and keeping the level of cleanliness was a challenge. We changed shirts and underwear once a week for Shabbat. My brothers had special shirts with detachable collars which they changed more frequently to appear better groomed.

There was no indoor plumbing in Szczakowa. At night we used a 10 gallon bucket in the kitchen. For day use we had an outhouse which was shared with some neighbors. Come Springtime we had to empty it with buckets and pour it on the garden. Naturally it took several days after that to clear the smell. But in return we had fruit trees and all kinds of vegetables including enough potatoes to last for the Winter. We also raised chickens in our back yard which gave us fresh eggs every day. In the Winter we kept a bunch of chickens in the basement where it was warm. We also got a few fresh eggs which were impossible to buy. The garden was quite big and we all pitched in each afternoon to keep it going. Next to us there was a nursery with a professional gardener. He used to teach me tricks in the garden like growing vegetables under glass. I

also used to raise some vegetables under glass. My brothers helped sometimes but they were busy at their trade and in the evenings they usually spent time with their friends or on dates. I was used for all kinds of errands and I did not mind as I wasn't anxious to study.

There were no banks in Szczakowa. We had one pharmacy that looked like a bank and one doctor. Most of the medical services were provided by midwives. You could get some first aid at the barber shop. Even if there would be medical services, very few people could afford them. This may seem odd but it was normal in Poland and even advanced compared to some of the more backward towns. I do remember that my father suffered a heart attack in 1934. We used the services of the doctor but it used up all our savings. All of my mother's reserve money was gone and suddenly we found ourselves owing a lot of money. However, to the best of my knowledge, Father recovered completely.

My father was a peaceful man. I never saw him angry at anybody and he never hit me or my brothers. He was very well liked amongst his peers.

In shul he had his own seat with a stand near the Aron Kodesh. Now that I look back, I do not understand why my father insisted on living in Szczakowa, or for that matter in Poland. It is my opinion that Poland was the most backward of the Baltic countries. He had the opportunity to leave Poland and did not do it. At one point in the thirties we received a letter from one of his cousins in New York urging him to come live in the USA. He even offered to expedite the immigration. My parents completely dismissed this offer. My parents had a modest but good life and could not imagine anything better than what they had.

My two brothers Morris (Chaim Moishe) Raab and Romeck (Yanche) Raab were 2 fine outstanding young men. Both were custom-made tailors. Morris had a custom tailor shop in Katowitz with a partner by the name of Shneiderman. They seemed to be doing fairly well. Morris also entered the gymnazium (high school) to get a 6 year diploma by correspondence. He was the brains of the family. I thought that he was very smart, rest his soul. He was a very serious person. Morris was near-sighted. When it came time for him to go to the army, my father did not like the idea and wrote a

letter to the examining doctor. This doctor was supposedly my father's buddy from way back. He wanted to free Morris from military duty on account of his eyesight. The doctor told Morris that normally he would excuse Morris from duty because of his eyesight but because of the letter that he received, he could not excuse him. He had to join the army. In the beginning he truly suffered but later he started to enjoy the service. He even became an officer in the Polish army and served with the very selective Polish Engineers.

My second brother, Romeck, was also a tailor and an officer. He served with the artillery. He was a very good-looking young man and everybody loved him. He resembled my mother in looks, charm and charisma. Morris and I looked like my father. The girls were falling all over my two brothers and my parents very much wanted them to get married. My older brother was very picky and my middle brother would not get married until the older one did. At least this was the excuse we heard at the dinner table whenever the subject came up. My mother would sometimes drop some names of girls she thought might be suitable but this particular advice was ignored.

I was the youngest, 10 years younger. The whole family looked to me as the Mashiach and they expected from me more than I was capable to deliver. I was being educated in Hebrew and secular studies. I took violin lessons and had additional tutors to supplement my education. I always tried hard and worked hard. However, despite this attitude towards me, I was still 10 years younger and was not included in many discussions between my brothers and my parents. A lot of the subjects were over my head but I did not realize this at the time and did not like this exclusion. I would also complain to my parents that my portion on the dinner plate was smaller than my brothers'. My mother responded that if I finished what I got, she would give me more, but I never finished even the first portion!

My oldest brother was over 6' tall and very handsome. One time me and my mother went to visit him in Krakow where he was stationed. It happened to be a Sunday during the lunch hour. We were sitting in the lounge when a colonel came over to the officer's dining room and said to my mother, "Mrs. Raab, take a look at the boys that

your son serves with.” We looked and they were all giants. Nobody was under 6’ high. All of the boys were big and husky. My brother happened to be the only Jew among them and the only Jew in the military school.

After Morris graduated military school and became an officer, he was in charge of supervising armored transports to different parts of the country. One time he accompanied a train with tanks and cannons from Eastern Poland to Western Poland. He happened to pass through Szczakowa. At about 3:00 a.m. somebody knocked on our windows. I was alone at home with my parents and we were unbelievably scared. My father did not know what to do. We looked through the peep hole and it was dark outside. All you could see were 3 big soldiers with rifles hanging down their shoulders. Suddenly, we hear a voice, “Open up, it’s me, Chaim Moishe.” The joy was indescribable! He had planned the whole thing. He rerouted the train to a side rail and decided to go home for a good meal. My mother was an expert gourmet cook. Sometimes older people came to her for lessons and learned how to make masterpieces out of leftovers. She would put together a meal for the 3 soldiers. The 2 Poles were

flabbergasted. We all sat and talked until late morning. It was an experience of a lifetime.

I was especially impressed by this experience. I loved the uniform and would sometimes try to follow my brother's footsteps. I also enjoyed marching in the military parades. I was perhaps a little envious. The military preparedness that I attended was supposed to make it easier to get in to the military school so I attended eagerly. I dreamed of having a military career.

This happened often after that. Sometimes Morris would send some soldiers to our house to bring greetings from him. The word got around that at Morris' house you could get a great meal. Most of these boys were from the uneducated and unsophisticated part of Eastern Poland. Sometimes I would go to the railroad station and stay there and stare at the trains hoping to see my brother or his friends. It was very lonely without them at home, especially on Shabbos. My parents usually went to sleep after lunch, I was left alone to study the holy books, but my brains did not cooperate. I had no patience and I just was not talented in this area. I

did like to repair things and I was very handy with my hands.

I was a big dreamer. I hoped some day to get away from Szczakowa. My mother would occasionally take me to Krakow. My mother had two brothers and two sisters who lived there. One brother was a painter, one a shoemaker, both quite poor. One sister had a small store with her husband and squeezed out a living and the other sister, Chudis Hochman, was married to a rich man. They had dairies where they would distribute milk in several cities. Uncle Hirsh and Aunt Chudis were quite arrogant and most of the family did not like them. My uncle especially, was fond of making fun of anybody who was not of his class in society. He would especially make fun of me, being the youngest and the smallest. My brother served in the military in Krakow for 2 years and was often invited over for Shabbat but he tried to find excuses not to go.

I remember an incident that happened with the Hochman's. The house we lived in was inherited from my mother's parents. My father paid off Mother's siblings for their portion except for Aunt

Chudis. She said she could wait. Father paid everybody in dollars. Each share came to \$2,000.00 and at that time there were about 9 zlotys to the dollar. When Aunt Chudis' payment came due, the dollar fell to 5 zlotys. Uncle Hirsh insisted to be paid in zlotys based on 9 zlotys per dollar. Father disagreed. The rich uncle sued my father and won. This created animosity in the whole family. The rest of the family did not know who to side with but there were lots of opinions!

Meanwhile, back home.... One Shabbos afternoon, when I was about 11 years old, me and some of my friends were walking the main street. I looked up and I saw a strange looking soldier dressed in the same uniform that my brother wore. The Engineers were identifiable because they wore a certain kind of boot. He also stopped and stared at us. I asked him if he was from the 5th engineer battalion in Krakow. He said, "Yes!". I asked him if he knew my brother and he said, "Yes!" He was bringing greetings to his parents. I grabbed his hand and took him home. As usual my mother fed him. He stayed a few hours and left. My parents enjoyed it very much.

My mother was especially proud of my oldest brother. He was like her lover. Sometimes late on a Saturday afternoon, we would go for a stroll on the main street. My mother would always walk arm in arm with Morris. She looked to be in love with him. She was very happy whenever she could do something for Chaim Moishe. Sometimes I felt that there was a little bias toward her oldest son. But, looks can be deceiving. You could not blame her if it were true. We all thought that he was smart and handsome. He wore wide rimmed glasses and always walked with his head up. Sometimes I think he had a chip on his shoulder. He was an outstanding son and very respectful towards his parents. We called him "Professor" because he looked like one.

Normally the 11th army of foot soldiers was stationed in Szczakowa. When Pesach time came almost every resident of Szczakowa took home at least 2 Jewish soldiers for the whole Passover holiday. There were over a couple hundred Jewish soldiers that lived on the other end of Poland and it was impossible for them to go home. It just happened that both brothers came home on furlough for Pesach and we went to shul in the evening. On

the first night of Pesach the gabbai and the Rabbi came over to my father and said laughingly, "We are stuck with 2 soldiers who would very much like to spend a Seder with a nice family. Would you take them home with you? My father looked at my brothers and nodded his head "Yes". You could see the happiness and pride on his face. The love that we all shared gave me a good feeling.

My father , my 2 brothers and me signed our formal names Turteltaub Falche Raab, because my grandparents were married at the Rabbi and did not bother to go to the City Hall for a license. That meant that according to the Polish law they were not legally married and my father's name was officially that of his mother, Turteltaub. This was not unusual in Poland especially in Eastern Poland. It was very annoying to the family so my father decided to do something about it. It took many years to cut through the Polish bureaucracy. But, my father would always see his projects through to the end. After much hard work, the Polish court and government consented and gave us back our rightful names in 1936. We all became Raab. It was a very big relief to everybody, especially for my brothers in the military. The Poles could not pronounce

Turteltaub let alone spell it. We ended up with weird nicknames from the teachers and students.

Usually, our summer vacations were spent on my father's cousin's farm. The farm was located in the middle of a forest. We would take the train to Rzeszow, go by horse and buggy to Sokolow (approximately 25 kilometers) and then continue another 6 km to the farm. From our home to the farm was a distance of 180-190 km. If we left Szczakowa at 6:00 a.m. we would get to the farm at 10:00 at night. We would spend approximately 4-6 weeks every summer on the farm. The buildings were several bungalows cut out in the middle of the forest. It was beautiful, like life in the wilderness. My cousin's farm consisted of about 700 acres of forest and about 400 acres of arable land. They grew everything from wheat and potatoes to vegetables and fruit trees. He also had about 8 cows, a calf, and 2 horses. By Polish standards this was a large farm.

There were 6 sons and one daughter, the youngest child, in this family. I used to get up between 3:00 a.m. and 4:00 a.m. and go with all of my cousins into the forest to pick mushrooms and

berries. We would bring them home and mother fried them with onions and eggs for breakfast. Then, I helped my great great grandfather to chase the cows to the pasture. My great great grandfather was 116 years old, rest his soul. He had all of his faculties and recognized everybody by sight. I got along well with my great grandfather. He happened to like me very much. We would say the Psalm of David together while waiting for the cattle to finish eating in the field. At noon, we went back for lunch which consisted of mashed potatoes with butter and buttermilk. Although life was a routine, it was not tiresome.

Every Wednesday morning we went by horse and buggy to Sokolow where there was a big open market. Farmers, both Jew and Gentile, traded chickens, horses, cattle, clothes and everything you could imagine. The market was a busy place and we had a very active day. When it ended, we would go to a restaurant and order white rolls and barbecued pigeons. We ate it bones and all. This was a treat! Then we went back to the farm early. I got to drive the horse and we all went home to sleep.

We had a synagogue on the farm which was active only on Friday evening and Saturday morning. Some Jewish farmers lived 6-8 kilometers away and the farm was surrounded by many villages with Jewish farmers. Occasionally one of my brothers came to visit us on the farm for a weekend. The Jewish farmers would come for services and my brothers were honored by my cousins to conduct the services sometimes. My oldest brother was especially good at this. He also sang in the choir at home. He had a cantorial voice and studied with different cantors. My parents enjoyed his services very much. In my town we had many men with cantorial talent. When the high holidays came around, most of these men were hired out to different little towns to conduct the high holiday services. As much as half of the Jews in my town left to different cities to conduct the services. This was a source of income for them which they desperately needed.

Szczakowa was a small Catholic town and one could not avoid being noticed. We had a large convent with nuns and next to it we had the Jesuits. We called them unfinished priests or priest apprentices. They were very antisemitic. If they

met a Jewish boy and a Catholic boy on the streets, the Catholic boy would stop, kneel down in front of him and kiss his hands. We sort of ignored them. This did not sit well with the priest or the assistants. They tried to spread all kinds of anti-Jewish rumors. But, until 1936 it was not that visible. Although the Polish government did not promote anti-semitism, it found it's own way, especially among the peasants. They were mostly ignorant and illiterate and very easy to brainwash. Their ignorance made them dangerous.

THE MASKS COME OFF

Most of the merchants in my town were Jewish and had stores on the main street. After Hitler came to power, most of the Polish population that considered themselves adopted Germans, FolksDeutsche, began to show their ugly faces, antisemitism was on the rise and getting worse. In the Elementary school, I remember every so often I used to complain to my elder brothers that I was being attacked on my way home from school. My brothers used to wait for me after school to escort me home. We only lived a 5 minute walk away. Once in a while, my brother used to catch some of

the boys, punch the heck out of them and after that it was quiet for a while. This was going on from about 1936-1939. As soon as the Germans occupied Silesia (including Szczakowa), all the masks came off their faces. The antisemitic attitude was not only tolerated but encouraged by the Germans. They were dangerous especially when they were drunk, which was quite often. It became accepted and legal to kick the Jews around.

We got along with our neighbors for the most part. But, it was getting harder and harder, especially in school. It was not unusual that when you went out at night you might come home with a knife in your back. The last few years you could smell the antisemitism in the air. I remember approximately 1938, we had this Jewish tailor in my town. He hired this Gentile boy as an apprentice. With his luck, one Thursday late afternoon they found the boy hanging from a rope in the tailor's toilet. It didn't take long and by Friday you could see the Polish mass starting to congregate in the outskirts of the town near the convent, getting ready for a lynching party. In other words a pogrom. This town consisted of the main street starting from the railroad station and ended at the church and

convent approximately 2 miles down. Late Friday afternoon you could see a crowd of several hundred people on the outskirts of the town near the church. We, the Jews, locked all of the doors and shutters. Nobody believed that in Szczakowa there could be a pogrom but it sure looked like one was in the making. The Jewish people were justifiably scared and did not take it likely.

My father happened to know the Police Chief. We used to give him every year at Christmas time a big carp fish and my mother, rest her soul, baked a big twisted chole, like the type you might make for a wedding. My father talked to the Chief of Police. I assume that a few other prominent people did as well. They tried to convince the Chief that in no way did the tailor hang the boy. For whatever reason or miracle, the Chief took a couple of his so called deputies, went down to the crowd. I really do not know what he said or did; we were all locked up in the house. We did not go to shul or eat dinner. There was me, my parents and my 2 older brothers, rest their soul in peace, and we did not know what to expect. That is how we spent the night. Come Shabbat morning, we all went to shul like nothing happened. It looks like we will never

know what happened but most people attributed it to a miracle from above.

This does not mean that there were no other individual incidents. My mother had a brother who was a painter and who lived in Szczakowa. One time he did not finish his job at the glass factory before Shabbat. So, he decided to go there after Shabbat in the evening. He took his daughter, Sabina, with him. As soon as he got to the glass factory he was attacked. His daughter got knifed in her buttock. Since we lived close by, he stopped into our house. My mother gave her first aid to stop the bleeding. Then my uncle took her home. Another cousin was knifed in his back and he was lucky to survive.

Besides specific antisemitism, there were also gangs of drunks roaming around which attacked whatever was in sight. There was a rumor that these gangs were paid by the gentile merchants to break windows at night. They mainly wanted to scare the Jewish merchants who had most of the shops on the main street.

Every year on Sukkot we were greeted with a barrage of stones thrown into the Sukkah while we

were eating. That is how some of the Polish crowds and gangs enjoyed themselves. At the Polish national holidays we had military parades that mixed military, patriotic, and commercial parades. Everybody liked to go and watch it. After the parades we got greeted by the Polish gangs with stones, and rocks. If you didn't run home fast, you could end up with a split or bloody head. If you looked too Jewish, it was hard for you. The Gentiles did not trust you if you had a beard and peyyot and you would not do well as a merchant. Your wife may have to go to a different town and try to peddle some goods. The man would stay home and tend to the children.

On August 21, 1939 the Polish government declared a general mobilization of all reservists and those who had any military service and experience, which meant me and my 2 brothers. I was to report in my home town to 11th battalion of the Polish army. A couple of days later, which was a Friday afternoon. I got permission to go home for Shabbat. My 2 brothers were also mobilized and gone. I was supposed to return to the barracks Saturday at midnight. My mother decided that I should not return to the army. In the meanwhile, my middle

brother came back home Saturday afternoon. He was released because he had a rheumatic heart. Saturday evening my father went to the railroad station and bought 3 tickets for me, my mother, and my middle brother to go to his cousin's farm near the Russian border. This was his first cousin, Mechel Turteltaub. We were to stay with him on his farm in hopes that Poland will win the war: Then we could come home. We lived in Western Poland, approximately 12 kilometers from the Polish border with Germany, and he figured that there would be less danger if we stayed closer to the Russian border in Eastern Poland. We were a close knit family. Suddenly, we got spread apart into different parts of the country. This affected my parents very negatively. My father started to suspect that he made the wrong decision to stay in Poland and not listen to my brothers. By that time, it was too late.

That Sunday morning in August, 1939, at 5:00 a.m., my mother, my brother, and myself took the train to Rzeszow. Since I did not report back to the Polish army, Sunday morning the Polish military police came to my house looking for me. Apparently, I was marked as a deserter. My father told them that I was not at home and that he did

not know where I was. They did not believe him and they searched all over the house then pulled out their bayonets and cut up all the mattresses. They turned the house upside down and left. Since there was no way to communicate and mail delivery had stopped, all we could do was hope that my father was okay and safe.

We stayed at the farm until Sunday, September 3, 1939. In the meantime, on September 1st the war with Germany broke out. The Germans occupied Poland and the German Reich annexed my town as part of the German Reich. All the citizens, with the exception of the Jews, became Germans. Things did not go the way that my parents expected them to go. Silesia was overrun by the Germans within hours of the start of the war, and the Germans were advancing through all of Poland. We could hear the German planes flying over the villages and farms. Sometimes you could see them in the sky. We would all run into the forest which was across the road. My great-grandfather was almost always the first one in the forest and you could hear him calling out names encouraging us to come to him. He was a very sweet little old man. We assume he was killed by

the Nazis. I often wonder how many more years this 116 year old man would have lived if not for the Nazis.

At this time, my cousin, his sons, and me decided to go deeper toward the Russian border again for safety reasons. We walked approximately 30 kilometers a day, approximately 300 kilometers in all. We took some food with us and we rationed it for the first few days. It is lucky that we got along with each other. Nobody tried to outsmart anybody else. From the start we had the same goal, to get back home. We all assumed that this activity was just a temporary phase

In the meantime my father walked to Krakow, approximately 55 kilometers but decided not to continue because it was overrun by the Germans. Father went back home and we were still cut off from each other. It was very hard on my father because he never did any cooking for himself. Later we found out that sometimes he did not eat for days. Although he had reasons to, I never saw my father complain. He was always satisfied and appreciated his good luck.

My brother and mother, my cousin and his wife, and a couple of their young children stayed back on the farm. Me and my three cousin's continued to walk until we came to the river San. It was a major river in Poland and not crossable by swimming. There was a Polish guard who wouldn't let us pass the bridge because it was mined. At about midnight the bridge was blown up on purpose to slow down the Germans. We managed to get on a pontoon and cross the river which led us to the next village, Korlowka. There we rested for a few hours and continued to walk. We passed a series of little towns and villages. It was very chaotic. Wherever we came we saw people robbing from each other. To get a little sleep under a roof you had to break in but most of the homes were already broken into. They were abandoned and dirty. There were bugs, cockroaches and flies all over and it was hard to fall asleep in this mess. We had to break into several houses before we could find one that was half way decent. Of course all the food was gone; the Polish army looted everything as they returned from the fronts.

We walked and walked until we got to a little town named Bilgoraj hoping to pick up some

nourishment. Unfortunately, we struck out. The Polish army was there before us and plundered and stole everything that was possible. The city was all burned out. All you could see were chimneys that looked like monuments in a big graveyard. You could see the soldiers eating chicory and coffee. Things were bad. Once we saw the Polish artillery shoot down one of their own planes. The pilot bailed out and he was swearing up and down. He appeared to be under the impression that the Polish army would still win the war. I even considered rejoining the Polish army but after what I saw in Bilgoraj, the shape that the army was in, I changed my mind.

Hungry, tired, and exhausted, we continued to walk toward Tarnograd. German patrol planes spotted our group that now numbered close to 100. We realized that we were spotted when they dropped flares in our area. We were laying in ditches that were by the side of the road. The Germans started to shoot artillery at our group. I was laying next to my cousin when shrapnel hit his shoulder and tore a piece of his shoulder off. We gave the cousin the best first aid that we could. I happened to be lucky that I was not hit by any. We

crawled all the way to Krasnogrod, about 24 kilometers, in the darkness. We were on our stomachs to avoid the shrapnel. There were women with small children, crying and screaming, and we tried to get away from this group, but it was impossible.

From there, hungry and exhausted, we almost reached Rava-Ruska. This was a major city before Lvov. We were a little late and it was already overrun by the German army. They were selecting and segregating all kinds of people. There were German patrols on motorcycles riding up and down the roads and we could see Jews being lined up and shot into the River Bug. The German patrol checked our identification. I happened to have my student card with me. The German soldier said, "Oh you are a Folksdeutsche," and he didn't check the other cousins' cards. The German officer greeted me and said, "You go home. Everything is normal in Silesia. Don't be afraid of anything." That was yet several kilometers from Lvov. We never made it to Rava-Ruska as we were overtaken by the Germans. We still had not eaten or drunk for almost 3 days. We all realized that it was a mistake to leave home, but it was too late. We

started to think about going home as quickly as possible. It was a very difficult decision to either continue toward Russia or go back to the farm. We could easily have gotten away from the Germans and escaped to Russia but this is hindsight. Most of us were children and the thought of going back home was very favorable. Usually the older cousins wanted to go farther and the younger ones wanted to go home. It was a very difficult decision to make to be worried about our parents and about ourselves. We did not know if there would be anything to come back to.

Then, we decided to return to the farm. We crossed the River Bug and continued toward the River San. We saw the Germans killing people like one would swat flies. We saw a lot of beard cutting also. It was like a German celebration. We managed to pick some berries and some leaves that my oldest cousin said were edible. He was trained in the Hachshara on how to survive in the outdoors. That is what we ate. We managed to make it to the river San again. There we saw the same thing that we saw at the River Bug. Jews were being shot into the river. You actually could see the rivers running red in some places from the blood of the Jews. You

heard continuous screaming and crying from women and children. We were a group of 5 confused and scared young men. Our luck could run out at any moment. Every few meters the German army made blockades with check points. It was quite difficult to pass without being noticed. The German soldiers used to pick out the Jews and their families. The Jews tried to camouflage themselves in the refugee groups but most of them were pointed out by the Poles. It seemed to me that the Poles were waiting for this opportunity and enjoyed seeing the Jews killed.

Again and again, I showed my student identification card and we were let through. We were scared, tired, and exhausted. There were some more arguments about which direction to travel. We saw some horrible things. We were blaming each other for making wrong decisions. I was amongst the four brothers but I was the youngest one. I cried a little, but I tried to control myself and not act like a child. It was not easy as I was only 15, a naive child.

We were walking barefoot and we carried our shoes on our shoulders to save the shoes and to

reduce the rubbing on our blistered feet. Also, it was more comfortable to walk barefoot on the dirt and sand roads. Finally, we crossed the River San, again on a pontoon, and continued until we got back to Lezansk. I do not know why we stopped in Lezansk, but my oldest cousin, the one with the Hachshara experience, insisted that we do. We respected him and listened. It was not too far out of the way. We thought we might find some relatives but they were gone and this turned out to be a waste of time.

There was a large convent with nuns. We knocked on the gate and an old nun came out. My cousin begged her to let us in to rest and freshen up. Maybe she could spare some food. She immediately recognized that we were Jewish and she slammed the gate closed. As she walked away you could hear her cursing the Jews saying that we were not welcome. This was not unusual. It was typical Polish Catholic behavior towards Jews. Of course, we were not disappointed as we did not expect differently. It just so happened that in Szczakowa there happened to be a convent with nuns and Jesuits. When they walked in the streets, the gentile boys knelt down and kissed their hands. The Jews just ignored them

and this probably caused some resentment. They never showed any love towards Jews.

From there we went back to the farm. As we continued to walk, we encountered merchants who had some food and tea. Their prices were completely out of reach. We could not afford even 1 cup of tea. Unfortunately, those vultures were Jews with Peyot and Tzitzit. "Pity on your fellow man" was not in their vocabulary. It was sad to see innocent people being gouged at such a time. Their greed was so obvious that it was a pity to look at them. Even I as a Jew learned to dislike them. They did not know yet what was going to happen to them as they did not see what we saw down the road.

So, we continued to walk and passed several villages. Most of the people were gone. When night came we just walked in, found a bed or a spot, it did not matter, and went to sleep. Since I was the smallest and the youngest, I ended up sleeping in a baby crib one time and in a baby buggy one time. All you had to do was to let your feet hang out. The main thing was to let your head rest. At one time we did have a bicycle and we took turns riding it. But, it busted to pieces soon into our trip, so we

walked. We continued, hungry and thirsty, and we simply had no choice. We thought that we may not make it back to the farm.

The road returning to the farm was awful. Everybody was scared to death and we did not think that we would make it back to the farm. All of the shooting, killing and screaming that we saw was a sight that is unbelievable and impossible to describe. The German soldiers acted like wild animals roaming in the forest. It looked like they enjoyed all this killing. We had never seen anything like this and it was scary. By some miracle, we managed to get back to the farm alive. Our lips and noses were burned from the sun and our feet were full of blisters and sores.

Everybody was sad and scared and had very little hope. Since I was the youngest, I did not show as much worry as the rest of them, but on the inside I was plenty scared. This was a change in my life. I was used to always being protected by my brothers or my father. All I had to do was to open up my mouth and I had more help than I needed. Here, suddenly, I was on my own. I was not ready for this. I found out that you can learn quickly if you

have to. I felt like Rabban Gamliel in the Haggada who suddenly felt like a man of 70 years old.

Everybody at the farm was worried about us and thought that we would never return. They thought that we had met with bad luck. They said that it was a mistake to let us go and they could not forgive themselves for letting us go. When we finally reached the farm it was nothing but kissing and hugging. The happiness was a superficial happiness. Everybody's nerves were on edge. The tension was almost tangible. Cousin Meichel walked around completely bewildered. You couldn't talk to him he had so many worries. We became a burden to him too.

The cousin employed approximately one dozen rangers to patrol the forest on the farm. They seemed to be very friendly and nice people before the war. They would come to our cousin's house, make reports, and turn in money that they had collected for small pieces of pine needles that Polish people would buy to insulate their houses in the Winter. They would have a meal at my cousin's house and they had a very cordial relationship with him. About a week later, one evening the rangers

and a few other village gentiles came knocking on the doors with their rifles. They broke the windows and shot at the house. Our cousin happened to have several hunting rifles in the house. Everybody was shooting at each other. It was like a full-scale war. Everybody thought this was the end and we were whispering the Shma. A few of the rangers got injured and eventually they got discouraged and left.

Things were getting worse by the minute. We were afraid to step outside. We were running out of food and money and we became a burden to our cousin. It seems that he had enough problems without worrying about us. We could see the family whispering and pointing to us. It was easy to figure out, that they wanted just to go home. They were too nice of a people to come out and say it but they did not have to. Mother talked things over with us and we decided that it made no sense to waste any more time. We had to go home and when we informed our cousins of our decision, there were no objections from anybody.

A few days later my mother, brother, and me were ready to go back home. There was no

communication but we had no choice but to go search for my father. Again, we were facing the unknown. The atmosphere was very dark and somber. After we left, we never saw the cousins again. Until today, after many computer searches, much time and money, I still do not know what happened to any of them. Their names were Michael, Yitzchak, etc... Turteltaub. I have asked, researched, and done everything possible but I could not find anything or any clue as to their whereabouts. I paid a fee at Yad Vashem and they could not find any trace. We searched at the Holocaust Center in Washington, DC.. We searched at the Survivor's Gathering in Jerusalem but no trace of any Turteltaub could be found. When we settled in Los Angeles I found a gentleman by the name of Saul Turteltaub. I tried to ask him about his family roots but he quickly shut me up and refused to continue the conversation. Maybe he was afraid that I would ask him for money. I figured that he was not interested and I did not approach him again.

Nobody from my father's side of the family survived, that I know of. Fifty years ago I needed somebody to lean on. Perhaps we could have shared

shoulders.... I am sure we could have. There is 1 cousin on my mother's side who lives in Boro Park. This cousin is the daughter of my mother's third brother who was a painter and lived in Szczakowa. Occasionally, we meet on wedding, bar mitzvah, or other occasions. As far as I know, I am the only survivor of my father's side. It is so tragic.

After my mother decided to go back home, we left most of our belongings on the farm. We expected a hard journey and thought it would be easier if we traveled light. We hired a horse and wagon to get to the railroad station in Rzeszow, approximately 30 kilometers away. When we got there we found out that the station was bombed out so we had to walk to the next town. Unfortunately, the next town was also disturbed, uncoordinated, full of refugees. My mother decided to continue walking. Eventually, the German army caught up with us on the road. They were returning from the front with wagons, trucks, tanks, and cannons. We thought that this was the end of us, that we would end up like the people we saw at the river.

It seemed that God was with us again. My brother and me looked as Jewish as could be and we

were frightened beyond imagination. But the Germans didn't know the difference unless the Poles would point the Jews out. The Germans started to flirt with my mother. Mother spoke a fluent German and she did not look very Jewish. Also, they found out that we were from Silesia, which they considered as German occupied by Poland after World War I. With all of this in mind they offered us a ride on one of their wagons. They gave us bread and cheese. We were glad and thankful to God for many reasons. By this time my mother was quite worn out and ready to rest. We truly had a miracle when we were offered a ride but we were afraid that we might get killed for deceiving the German soldiers.

There again the roads were full of dead bodies, dead horses. German soldiers were beating people and there was awful screaming. We were sitting on this German military wagon and we were scared that the German soldiers would find out that we were Jewish. You could smell the dead bodies laying in the field for who knows how long. We passed many little Jewish towns and the cries of women and children were horrible. Until this day I cannot understand how our God, the God of

Abraham and Moses hearing all of this crying, could ignore it. Can anybody blame us survivors for doubting if there is a God? Many times I think about it and I cannot come up with an answer. I like to believe that there is a God. I raised my children with this belief.

Finally, we got to Tarnow. It was not a pleasant welcome. We found out that the Germans burned down the synagogue with the Jews locked in on Rosh Hashanah. The atmosphere was very heavy. My mother managed to get tickets on a freight train to Krakow. My mother happened to have 2 sisters and 2 brothers in Krakow. As soon as we arrived in Krakow we went to her youngest sister. They had a little neighborhood grocery market, barely squeezed out a living. We stayed there for a couple of nights. Mother became restless and decided to go home with my brother, of course, very anxious to find my father. We found out that my father did leave Szczakowa and came to Krakow for a couple of nights. But, he was worried about us and went back home. We had not heard from him from the day we left to his cousin until we got to Krakow. Poland was a backward country. We did have telegraph but after the war started, that was out of

service immediately. It was not easy to find transportation but somehow she managed. She was a very talented, resourceful, and smart lady. Mother and brother left for Szczakowa.

Mother decided to leave me with my uncle. I could help him out in the market. My mother felt this was the right thing to do because there would be one less mouth to feed at home. Also, there were rumors that the Germans were killing all the young people that they saw. At that time, I did not make decisions; I just did what I was told. I quickly adapted and worked very hard at becoming a grocery man.

The uncle was very happy and said that I would earn my keep. My Aunt was a very sick woman. Ever since her daughter's birth, nine years before, she was very sick. My mother used to visit her at least twice a month. My mother also helped her out financially. My father never objected to this.

Every day I had to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning to go to the bakery and stay in line for about 2 to 3 hours to get some bread and rolls for the store. That was not easy, in 25 to 30 degree

below zero weather. Normally, I covered my face with a woolen chimney sweeper's mask. One morning I left the house without it. I walked less than a block and felt my nose was hurting, burning. I looked in a glass window with a mirror and could see my nose was already white and frozen. I rubbed my nose with some snow and it was better. I continued to the bakery in spite of all the obstacles. I arrived to the line a little late and it was unbelievably long. I tried to squeeze my self in which was very hard.

There was another ordeal. In order to get results and to advance to the front of the line you had to do some maneuvering to cut in and out of the lines. If you didn't you would get to the front of the line and nothing would be left. You would come back with an empty sack. You had to cut in the line to survive. The problem was that the German soldiers were on motorcycles and they drove up and down close to the line. If you stepped out they would run you over. They did not care. Somehow I managed to bring to the store a sizable sack of rolls and bread every day which my uncle sold only to preferred customers, if they bought other groceries. Business was very brisk now as food

shortages were increasing and people would buy whatever they could get. By this time , any supply houses that were still operating did not make new deliveries.

It was a very hectic life but somehow I managed. My Uncle Shmuel and Aunt Risi treated me very nicely and I was well respected and appreciated. The store was open long hours but I did not mind. I felt safe and above all I wanted to be needed. Uncle would bring me lunch and dinner and I ate in the back of the store. This responsibility was new for me. I was trusted by my uncle with everything including money. If I did this job, he could spend more time with his wife, which she needed very much. She was bedridden most of the time. Since the birth of their daughter she was very weak and seemed to be sick. Their little girl, Salusia, was much younger than myself. She would come to visit us in Szczakowa occasionally. She was anemic and small for her age but everybody loved her. She was a very fragile little girl and not much help to anybody. We did not pay much attention to each other because I left before she woke up and I came to the house when she was asleep.

I got along very well with my uncle and aunt. They were very hard workers and barely squeezed out a living in their little store. A few weeks later the German army made a raid in the Jewish ghetto called Kazmierza. They shot out all of the windows. They went from apartment to apartment and took all the men folk away. They knocked on my uncle's door. They grabbed him. They asked if there was any other man in the apartment. My aunt answered "No". It just so happened that I was in the toilet. The German soldiers decided not to search. They believed my Aunt. They took my uncle and left. We never saw him again. My aunt closed the store a week later and a couple of days later I also went home. I felt very badly leaving Krakow and my aunt. We never saw each other again.

Traveling from town to town was very hard and dangerous. My hometown was in a part of Poland that was now annexed to Germany. This meant that one had to cross a border to get there. Also, Jews could not take the train because of the danger of getting caught. You tried to avoid being caught at all costs. Usually you traveled in small groups, which I did. There were about half a dozen people, some from my town and some from

neighboring towns. We hired a wagon with 2 horses from this Pole. Two Poles came with us. In the middle of the way they stopped the wagon and demanded more money, which they got. They took one of the girl passengers down, took her in the bushes and raped her. She put up a fight; you could hear her screaming. There was nothing we could do; our lives were in danger. All we wanted was to get home safely, which, late that night, we did. The whole journey was not more than 30 kilometers although it felt like 100.

I was very happy to be with my parents again. To me it was an ordeal to be separated. We lived in a very nice house with 3 bedrooms and a huge kitchen, where we also ate. Shortly before the war broke out in late '38 and '39, a lot of Jewish families were expelled from Lower Silesia Germany. Many of them came to Szczakowa as refugees. With them they brought different customs, liberal thinking, less religious standards and sophistication. We will not know if it was for better or worse because the war broke out soon enough. At this time however, it was necessary to share space with them. My mother rented out 2 bedrooms to Jewish

German refugees and got a little something for it. My brother and me slept in one bed in the kitchen.

Aside from these borders, most of my Jewish school friends were gone. There was no future in Szczakowa and very little hope. I was restless and quite lonely. My two brothers no longer lived at home. After my middle brother's military service, he returned home as a reservist. He got rheumatic fever in late 1938 which resulted in a rheumatic heart. He almost died but did survive. The doctor bills that we ran up between my father and my brother used up all of our savings and we went into debt. We thought that times were tough then but we had no idea of what was yet to come.

Food was expensive and scarce. We once had a beautiful garden in our backyard which kept me very busy. I grew a lot of vegetables which helped a little bit. I also invented a novelty in growing cucumbers. I put a small cucumber flower in a bottle and after the cucumber grew big enough in the bottle, I cut it off from the root and sealed it. I stored it in the basement and brought it up for Passover. I sold most of them for a very good price. It was unusual to have any kind of fresh vegetable

that time of year. I received a lot of praise from my parents for this. Everybody was very proud of this including myself. But, at the time that I came back from Krakow, things got very tough. We still adhered to Kashrut and food of any kind, let alone Kosher food, was very scarce and expensive. You had to stay in line for hours to get any type of food. Most of the time it was me who stood in line. My mother was very inventive and she improvised. We all realized how lucky we were to have her. Many times I think to myself how nice it would be to have her around, even for a short time.

My father and I registered with the German authority for daily work. My father was assigned to clean the military barracks and I was assigned to sweep the streets. This did not last very long. My brother stayed home, did a little tailoring to earn enough money so we all could eat. We ate poorly but we ate. Me and my father did not get paid for our work. Things were getting worse by the minute. Everything was happening quickly and unexpectedly. There was no way of coping with any situation especially when you lived in a country where the majority of people hated Jews. No matter where you turned, you were surrounded by enemies.

The Polish population in upper Silesia was a fifth column against the Polish government. The Polish government was too dumb to recognize this. The Polish propaganda was that the Germany would not last long, because they had no butter or meat. The Polish population believed it.

Our town got something we never had before. We got a Jewish community service, appointed and organized by the Germans. Everybody had to go to the center of the town to read the daily bulletin. This consisted of the German's daily requirements which changed every day. Most of these were laws against Jews and you had to obey them all. There also was German war propaganda bragging about their successes over the British and how many thousand tons of British ships they had sunk. One day they came to my house. This German officer, whose name was Herr Krieger, came with more soldiers. As usual I wore a hat in the house. This officer grabbed my hat and started punching me in my face, screaming, "Don't you know when a German officer comes into your house to take your hat off?" He gave me some beating, until I fell to the floor. He was kicking me all over until his sadism was satisfied. They left and my

mother and brother picked me up, cleaned off the blood and laid me on the bed. That officer had a revolver in his hand and he said that the next time he would shoot me. I am sure he was not joking and I was lucky that the German SS officer did not kill me. My mother was pleading and crying and perhaps this is why he stopped. I was in bad shape, hurting all over, but I had to be brave and not show it. This kind of beating was going on all over town. I could not expect help from anybody.

I did not have the time or luxury to recuperate. I had to go the next day to work or the Germans would come to our house to investigate, probably with tragic results. Every day we read about new laws decreed from the German government. Of course all the laws were against Jews. Several days later there was this bulletin in the Jewish community saying that on May 5th, 1940 at 8:00 A.M. all able bodies must report at the vestibule of the central railroad station. It also said that this was an exceptional new project and that we would get paid for the work. I did not want to miss this opportunity so I went. Whether or not you wanted to, you had to show up anyhow. When I got there I saw buses parked outside the railroad station. I

became suspicious. I wanted to turn around and run away but I was pointed out to the Germans by a supposed friend with whom I went to school. He had joined the German elite SS organization and wore a yellow SS commando uniform with a swastika on the armband. At that time, the Germans could not differentiate between a Polack and a Jew but they had no problems getting the Polish people to identify the Jews.

THE WORST OF TIMES

As soon as the guard noticed that I was trying to maneuver my way out, the German soldiers pushed me back into the vestibule of the station. There I waited until late afternoon; they kept a close eye on me. I tried to explain that I was a minor, underage. It did not do any good; nobody listened. There were at least a couple of hundred people that showed up. We were loaded on the buses and transported to a slave labor camp in Sakrau by Gagolin. This was about 50- 60 kilometers from where I lived. Already there were Jews from Chrzanow and Sosnowiec and from a few neighboring cities and villages. Jewish laborers greeted us at the gate singing a newly composed

song about how we were tricked by the Germans. The words of the song were translated, "Oi, Did you get screwed." They sang this song continuously. They sang a second song about not believing anybody, not even the greatest hero. They were also laughing at us perhaps to make themselves feel better that they were not the only ones in such straits.

I certainly did not feel like laughing. I was shocked and numb and suddenly I was really alone with nobody to help me or even to talk to. I felt like I was the rejected one, the one they could do without. I grew up overnight. I realized that although other people might sympathize with me, they did not really care about me. I met an older man in the camp who explained to me that there were only two groups here, the kickers and the kickees. Either you were a kicker and survived, or you were a kickee, and would not make it. I decided that I would be a kicker. I remembered my Hebrew studies when Moses said to the high priest, "First you pray for yourself, then for your family, and then for the rest of the congregation." I decided to adopt this philosophy.

The Germans appointed leaders and they made us sing as well. We arrived there late at night and were disbursed into the barracks. We settled down and realized that we would be there for a while. We were assigned to work on Reichsautobahn (RAB) building freeways. Everybody was asked about his qualifications. I was asked if I wanted to be a blacksmith. I said, "Yes!" I was starting to learn how to bluff my way through. This happened to be a lucky position and a privileged position. At the construction site the work was very hard. All day you were working with a pick and shovel in the hot sun. Most of the people, especially the older ones, did not last very long. They collapsed and died. It looked like some of them wanted to die.

On the construction site about 100' to the side, there was a shed. This was located on top of a little hill and you could look down and see what was going on. By the end of the day everybody brought their worn shovels and picks to sharpen. Inside the shed was an anvil, a stand where you burned a fire with coal, and bellows to blow the fire. I did all the sharpening. This was probably the premiere job on the construction site. Occasionally, an old German came by to check up on me. Sometimes he gave me

half of his sandwich. By law, I was not supposed to be alone in that shed. This was the old man's job and I was only supposed to help him. He figured that I was good enough to leave me alone. If I may say so, I had no problems doing the job without him. Toward the end of the day I locked up the shed and went down to the rest of the crew. We marched back to the camp always singing. I had ample opportunities to run away but I didn't. I had nowhere to run to and nobody that I could trust or who would help me. I was still hoping that the war would be over soon and I could go free.

We got supper which consisted of a bowl of German stew and a small piece of black bread. There were vegetables but the meaty, thick part of the stew went to the special privileged people. Since I was not working so hard, this was enough for me to get by. For a short time I did not eat the soup because I tried to keep kosher. This did not last a long time. The hunger got the best of me. I was getting food packages from home. Unfortunately, by the time I received the package, I got an empty box. The Capos opened up all of the boxes supposedly to check for weapons. At the same time they stole all that was worth stealing. They

especially wanted food. I knew that at home there was not enough food so why waste it on these parasites. I wrote home not to send any more food as I would rather see them eat it. In my opinion, my parents were more important than the occasional bits of food that did make it to me.

I came to the camp in a pair of custom made leather shoes. We had a shoemaker in Sakrau by Gogolin. A few weeks into the ordeal I had to take my shoes to the shop for repair. I never saw them again. A capo saw them and exchanged them for a pair of old rundown shoes. The worst part of it was that they were tight. Unfortunately, nothing could be done. I ended up with curled toes and corns from which I suffer to this day.

One day this big SS officer came to the construction site. The guard made a roll call. I watched all of this from the shed. He was counting and pulling out every 10th man and asking them to step aside. I did not know what to do. If I went down to join the roll call I might get killed. If he came to the shed and caught me alone he would either kill me or take me with him.

There was another slave labor camp down the road called, Anaberg. Occasionally we ran into people from there and exchanged news. From them we learned that Mussolini invaded Libya and succeeded in Tripoli, Bengazi, and Sofford. That is also how we knew about the fate of the people who were selected. The rumor was that all of the people that were picked from the roll call went to Auschwitz. It did not take long... I took a look and saw him coming toward the shed. I was scared to death. I knew that I was going to die and I recited the Shma. I grabbed a hammer and started banging into the anvil. I made so much noise that in the middle of the way he stopped, looked around, thought for a few moments, turned around and went back to the autobahn construction. That was when I first encountered the Angel of Death and survived. My heart was beating overtime and I was numb. It took me a while to compose myself. I remember thanking God at that time and thinking that it was a miracle because there was no other reasonable explanation.

In the mean time, back home, my older brother, who was in the Polish army with the engineers was taken prisoner by the Russians, and

released. He managed to contact my parents and even send a couple of packages home with all kinds of canned goods. All of us were very family minded and very close. We were always ready to help each other. My oldest brother, Chaim Moshe was like the Prime Minister and my father, the President. One thing was sure, we all loved and respected each other. There was no jealousy. Our house was a happy one. Very often, before the war, we would go on picnics together. We would have meat meals twice a day. We never had any budget or allowance. There was a drawer in the credenza special for the money. You took what you needed and for some reason, nothing was missing, there was no problem with honesty, and nobody ever complained.

Until the Germans attacked Russia my older brother was all right. He opened up a tailor shop in Rohatin, near Lvov. When the German army occupied the part of Russia where he lived, he was again captured and sent to a concentration camp. There he got sick. When the German army started to retreat they took him and many more mostly sick people to a field, made them dig ditches, and shot them all into the ditches. In 1947, not long after my brother died, I met a person in Milano, Italy, who

happened to be one of his friends who was there and witnessed the ceremony I just described. I believed his story, because he had nothing to gain by lying. Also, he described my brother 100% correctly. This man was also wounded and left for dead but he managed to run away and hide in the forest. He later joined the underground fighters.

By that time I lost touch with both of my brothers, but my parents still lived in the same place, Szczakowa. My father wrote to me very often sometimes 3 or 4 times a week. It is almost impossible to describe what a pleasure it was to come to the barracks and lay down and read a long letter from home. He would write very long letters almost like newspapers, about the details of what was happening in Szczakowa. It was a moral uplift. I assumed my father understood this and I sure appreciated this. I tried to return the favor as much as I could. My father's letters stopped coming 2 days after Shavuot, 1942. That is when the Germans took the remaining Jewish people of Szczakowa and shipped them to Auschwitz. My parents have never been heard of since, may they rest in peace. My middle brother somehow managed to save himself temporarily this time and ended up in Chrzanow,

which was the capitol of the county. Less than a year later, by some coincidence, he arrived in Markstaad, the same place where I was. That evening when I returned from work, I had the nicest welcome. When we stood in roll call, the Jewish camp commandant, Mr. Meister, came over personally with my brother to greet me. I was overwhelmed. He was assigned to my barrack which was a big exception. We slept in the same bunk, me on top and he below.

Back to me now. I was in Sakrau less than one year when the German army attacked Russia and advanced toward Leningrad. Apparently the Germans needed laborers to work on the Russian rails because the European rails happened to be a couple of inches narrower than the Russian rails. Again a German SS commander came and selected about 90% of the young people including me. It just so happened that before we were to be shipped out we had to pass a physical fitness examination by a doctor. Another miracle happened. The doctor was from my home town and a friend of our family. When I approached him, he made a "Do not worry" sign with his eyes. After he examined me, he told the SS commander that I was not fit for the

journey because I had a heart murmur (which was not true). Immediately I was assigned to a different group. Most of the people left the next day to the Russian front. Of those who left, less than a handful managed to stay alive and come back, all sick with typhus. Even those who returned, later died in the camp from typhus. Typhus spread around the camp as well and miraculously I was spared again.

In the mean time Camp Sakrau was completely emptied and the remnants were sent to Gross Masselwitz near Breslau where we did repair work to damaged railroads. Here it was getting harder. There was less food. Once in a while, our group managed to find a dog that was run over by a train. We would skin it and broil it over a fire. The guards happened to be elder vermacht soldiers. They looked aside. But, the hardship was also from cold as it happened to be a heavy winter. It was anywhere from 25-35 degrees centigrade below zero. We were definitely not prepared for that kind of cold. The striped uniforms were far from adequate. A lot of people died from cold weather. The barracks were also very cold as the wind went through the deteriorated walls. Sometimes we marched to the city of Breslau to shovel snow. That

was a long walk without nourishment. The city looked like a cemetery, cold and empty. That was late 1941-1942 and lots of stores were closed. Some of them were boarded up. We were very heavily guarded by soldiers and dogs so as not to escape. Besides, to escape you would have to have backing, protection, and a place to go. As far as I know, none of us had it. It did happen that when I was in Sakrau, a man named Saul Peck was spirited away in the middle of the night by some organized group. Other people in the camp tried it but they all ended up hanging from the end of a rope in the assembly yard. It did not make sense to me to run away with no outside connections; I decided to wait for Mashiach.

We were in Gross Masselwitz for a little over 8 months. In late 1942 this labor camp was apparently liquidated and we were sent to Markstaadt. Things became a little easier. The camp master, Mr. Baruch Meister, was from my home town of Szczakowa. He was a neighbor of mine and my brothers and he went to school together with them. They served in the Polish artillery together. Mr. Meister and his henchmen did the devil's work. They were sadistic to

everybody with the exception of the people from Szczakowa. We were treated like brothers. At first I got 2 dinner cards and once a week, we had dinner with him in his private room. We were known as the camp leader's special friends and so called "Untouchables".

I was assigned to a construction group. We worked very hard. We were a group of about 6 young boys. Most of us were from the over privileged side. Our Capo was a young German Jew named Herbert, who happened to be a very nice kid. Many times he went to bat for us. We worked for a German company, Henkelsohn, unloading all freight like food, machinery and parts for Krupverke, cement for construction. We managed to put aside potatoes, carrots, that we hid in the ground so they would not freeze. Also, since we were wearing those thin striped suits without underwear and we had to walk approximately 10 km to work, we used to line our bodies with the heavy paper from the cement sacks. Then we put the striped suits on top. This kept the wind away. I also brought some of the triple papers to the camp to sell. I should say trade. Money had no value; the main currency was food and cigarettes. I learned

how to feniggle and organize things in order to survive. The name of the game was survival. Life was cheap. People killed each other for a bite of bread. If the guards saw a fight they would immediately shoot you or whomever you were fighting with.

We also had an "infirmary" in the camp. You tried to avoid going there because most people never came out alive. If you had a cut or external bleeding, you urinated on it. Everybody did it and this seemed to be the best disinfectant.

I was considered to be from the overprivileged. We were building a new concentration camp in Finfteichen. Also, we were building factories for the Krupverke. Most of the work was done by forced laborers, French prisoners of war, and some 'so-called' free laborers, Poles and Czechs who were paid. Our job was to unload anything that came by freight train and load it on trucks or wagons going to the job site. Even though we worked very hard on this job there was a good side to it. We were not hounded by a bunch of capos and we were surrounded by a different class of people. We were a select group of young, strong,

boys who understood the situation. We got along with the owner of the company and the guard and they trusted us. Sometimes, if me or one of our group was tired, we might step aside into the rocks and take a snooze for a few minutes. As long as we did the work we were not bothered and sometimes received special privileges.

Occasionally I got to go on the truck accompanying the food boxes that were destined for the other construction sites. There was very little time but I always tried to take with me potatoes and carrots and I traded these for whatever I could. On the construction site I mingled with the free laborers, Polacks and Czecks, and with the French prisoners-of-war. I traded for cakes, special bread and tobacco and cigarettes. Most of these items were no problem to dispose of. We did not smoke but there were some people who gave up their last bite of bread for a smoke. Most of the food me and my brother ate and part we traded away for different types of food.

Early in 1943 the Germans sent the remnants of the Jews of Chrzanow to Auschwitz and sent a few younger men and girls to slave labor camp.

That's how by coincidence and luck my brother happened to join me. We were together from then on for the rest of his life. He was asked by his friend the camp leader to become a capo. He refused, he would be too soft and he would not in good conscience hit another Jew. He was the quiet type and that is why everybody loved him. The camp leader, Mr. Meister, assigned him to the tailor shop. This happened to be a blessing. Our labor camp was next to the French prisoner-of-war camp, the Czech labor camp, and the Polish labor camp. My working near the construction site, I could sneak into those camps and do some trading. My middle brother was making special hats and I traded them with French P.O.W.s with whom I made especially good friends. They loved these hats and in return I would get honeycake, chocolate, and bread which they got from the Red Cross. In the Czech laborers' barracks I traded the hats for bread. I happened to be resourceful and also was not afraid of danger. I did not consider the consequences and happened to get away with a lot of things. Most of the time mother luck was with me and protected me. We missed the rest of the family, but we lived with the hope that some day, with God's help, we would become united again. Hope gave us the will to stay alive.

Life in Markstaat became a routine and my brother and me got along very well as a team. We had showers but unfortunately the soap that we used was made from Jewish Humans. It was called "RIF". We did not know that at the time. The toilets were kept fairly clean. Our daily rations consisted of 1 piece of bread and some coffee in the morning. We had nothing to drink or eat for the entire 8 hours that we worked or while we walked to and from the jobsite. When we came home from work we got a soup made from potato peels. We were lucky as we did not have to eat this all of the time. In the Winter we had fires going all of the time and I used to bake potatoes in the fires. I would bring them back and eat them with my brother in the camp. Sometimes my brother would bring cake or candy to the room which he got as tips from the Capos or from Mr. Meister.

As far as timeline is concerned, we did keep track of the date. We even knew when Yom Kippur was. In the morning of Yom Kippur we did not take the coffee and we kept our bread for the evening. We fasted every Yom Kippur, which was not very hard as we were used to not eating. In general,

some days were bad and some days were worse. The atmosphere was controlled by the German guards who rotated duties. The best course of behaviour was to avoid the Capos and the block leaders.

It was bound to happen sooner or later and it did. I got caught by a German guard in the Czech barracks with loaves of bread in my hands. I was thrown into a solitary closet for approximately 2 days without food or water. Then I was pulled out and brought to one of the German officers. I could see a large limousine drive up with 2 civilians. They came into the office supposedly for a friendly interview. They asked me a few trivial questions and left. I found out later that they came to pick me up and deliver me to Auschwitz. While I was in solitary, my brother did not rest. He pleaded with Mr. Meister, the Jewish camp leader, on my behalf. Mr. Meister tried to persuade the German camp commander not to give me out to the German civilians. He tried to convince him that he could punish me in the camp as good or better. It looks like he succeeded. The limousine with the 2 German civilians left.

Mr. Meister sure lived up to his reputation. He was mean and sadistic except to a few of us from his home town. Another sadistic capo, Mr. Meister's second in command Hershele Machtinger, happened to love my brother. My brother made all kinds of novelty items that he liked. He was merciless to anybody else. I was taken to a special room by Mr. Meister's most sadistic capos, the second in command. Apparently, he had orders from Mr. Meister not to hurt me. He had with him a big, long club made from solid rubber. He closed the door. He told me that he will bang that club against the table and I should yell and scream as hard as I could because the German camp commander and Jewish camp leader were outside listening to my punishment. I let my pants down, he started banging the club, and I screamed murder. This went on for at least 20 minutes. Then he opened the door and threw me out to the sidewalk. Just for his pleasure he kicked me right in the anus with his pointed boots. I am sure he broke a bone in that area. After that I could not walk for weeks but the result was that my life was saved. My brother asked him why he kicked me so hard. He said it was for love. I told my brother to tell him that if there is a next time, he should not love me so much!

Life in Markstaat was bearable. It was mostly routine, but I made it challenging and adventuresome. It made my brother a little unhappy sometimes but I could not help myself. I could not stand still in one place. Even the German supervisor on the jobsite liked me very much. I would sometimes sneak away in the afternoon and take a much needed nap on top of a bunch of rocks. The main thing was that my brother and me had enough food and we were not getting beaten up. I still do not know why I was so daring. I could not help it: It was in my nature not to stand still. I think this actually helped us to survive.

One time we were unloading big cement sewer pipes, approximately 6' in diameter, with a block and tackle. It was my job to operate the chain from the block and tackle. Somehow, the hook happened to miss the chain and the pipe slipped, fell to the ground, and broke into pieces. It threw me down to the ground but somehow the big pieces fell around me and not on top of me. Again, luck was with me. Even my coworkers were astonished to see me emerge from the pile of rubble unharmed.

Most of the camp's slaves were building Finfteichen, a new concentration camp just a few kilometers from Markstaad where I was. After the construction was finished, we all moved over to Finfteichen. The Jewish camp commander, Mr. Meister, went to a different camp in Germany called Blechhamer. He took a few of his close friends with him. He did not pick me and my brother. We did not question this decision. It just so happened that some of the inmates in Blechhamer had relatives or brothers in Markstaad and supposedly knew that they were beaten or even killed by Mr. Meister. When he went to Blechhamer, the Germans had no use for Mr. Meister. He got demoted by the Germans and had no protection. In that new camp he and his friends suffered a lot of abuse: Revenge was everybody's desire. Some of the people expected answers for his sadistic behavior. At the same time, the people that came with him, innocent or not, had to suffer restitution for their leader's behavior.

Finfteichen became a full-fledged concentration camp. It was no longer a slave labor camp. Also, it became a branch of Gross Rossen, which was like Auschwitz, with crematories and

ovens. My brother no longer worked in a tailor shop. He had to do manual labor. I continued with the same work but here the atmosphere was different. Each barrack had a prisoner who was in charge. Most of them were Russians and Ukrainians and they were all criminals who came from jails where they were serving time for burglary or murder. They were Jew Haters and killers. They had to prove themselves to the Germans and the meaner they were to the prisoners, the better they were treated. They were also responsible for the cleanliness of the barrack. They lived in small rooms at the ends of the barracks, called Kopfstube. Most of these capos were gay and they had small boys living in the barracks with them. These kids did not go out. It was said that these kids' jobs were to clean the barracks but everybody knew better. Nobody paid attention or cared and it was better to ignore it.

All in all, things were getting harder. There was less food. Before, we had all Jews in Markstaat. Here in Finfteichen, we had a lot of Russians and Ukrainians. They were worse than animals. As I said, some of them became capos, block supervisors. They hated Jews more than the Germans and it showed. They were merciless. Every morning we

had roll call. We had to line up on the lot and be counted. Next to me there was this young man. Every morning I used to wake him up, help him get dressed and drag him out to the roll call. That particular morning I could not move him. Finally I left because I was afraid to be late. My brother said not to invite unnecessary beatings. So we went out and lined up. It just so happened that our block commander was a Ukrainian Jew hater. He called out my friends name. I answered that he was sick he could not come out. He grabbed me by the neck and said, "Come show me where he is."

He was full of anger and I had no choice but to go with him. He ran to my friends bed, got a hold of him and dragged him to the toilet. The toilet was an outhouse with a large hole and about 10' deep of excrement. He threw him into that hole. My friend drowned in the excrement. It was the most obscene thing one could ever see. I went back to the line up and later went to work. After watching my friend drown, screaming in the excrement, I had nightmares for weeks. I wanted to tell the camp Commandant but they knew what was going on and would not do anything about it. I would only invite beatings in the future. Like I said

before, the Poles, Ukrainians, and Russians were usually worse than the Germans. If I would stand up for my friend, I would be thrown in too. I cried like a little baby. Eventually I composed myself and thanked God that it was not me. My brother convinced me that I would not accomplish a thing by being a hero. I realized that he was right. He grabbed my arm and pulled me away.

Abuse and beatings were very common especially to the Jews. The Russian and Ukrainian block leaders were the worst. If they did not have an excuse they would create one to pick a victim and kill him. They might say that this person was guilty of some "crime" or of trying to run away. Sometimes they would hang an inmate and do a roll call. The other prisoners would have to march in the yard and spit at the naked body. If you did not spit you would be whipped and you were watched very carefully by the capos during this procedure. This abusive scene occurred very often.

Sometimes, for their amusement, the guards would put an oversized table down. This would be surrounded by soldiers holding rifles. They would push a man from the camp under the table and let a

huge German shepherd work him over. Whenever the man would try to run from under the table he would get kicked or hit with the rifle. We all had to stand in the cold yard and watch this barbarism. To us this was a nightmare and to the Germans, this seemed like entertainment and prevented the guards from getting bored.

Every so often when we came in marching from work almost the whole German regiment would be waiting for us at the gate. Everybody was searched. It looked like they would do this whenever they got tipped off that we were bringing in different weapons. You could see on the ground knives, bayonets, files, and disassembled guns. One time when we stopped there were all kinds of weapons lying on the ground. It happened that on the ground next to my brother was a home made knife with a long blade. The German guards grabbed him immediately, put him over a chair and grabbed a 1 x 5 board. His commander told him to give him 25 lashes with the board. When I saw what was happening I started to cry and scream. I begged the soldier not to do it, that he had a bad heart. It would kill him. Suddenly, the guard released my brother, grabbed me, turned me over on

the chair face down and said, "Then you take it for him." I continued crying and saying that this was not my knife but it did not help. One started hitting me and the other was counting and holding me down. I do not remember how many lashes I got. This was a game with the guards. They enjoyed it very much and after they finished with me, they laughed and told jokes to each other. I am not the only one that got such beatings that day. I heard other screams while I was being taken away. Also, some people were thrown in solitary confinement "closets". It did not matter to me because I immediately had another problem to solve, "How would I go to work tomorrow?"

I couldn't walk after that. My brother with another man, carried me into my barrack and laid me down on the so called bed. They gave me cold compresses which helped me feel better. The next morning I had to walk 10 km to work. I felt like my kidneys with everything else inside of my body came loose. For some reason the guard took pity on me and let me sit out the next couple of days. My brother managed to keep the guard away from me with the help of some friends. He was a little older

and perhaps carried some respect . This saved my life again.

At one time I was under the impression that German people were mostly educated, sophisticated and very intelligent. I soon found out differently. Educated people think for themselves and it is not easy to brainwash them. These people would follow blindly whatever they were told to do.

We had two kinds of guards. Some were from the SS who oversaw all operations. Some of the guards were Vermacht soldiers who for some reason were sent back from the battlefield. Usually, they came back from the Russian front due to illness. These soldiers were sometimes a little softer than the SS. On an individual basis, you could find some Vermacht who had a little humanity left in them. Perhaps they were fed up with the war or the system. They were afraid of each other so they were not free to exercise their discretion all the time especially when they were in a group. When they were in a group on a job or on a march, each tried to show how much meaner he was than the next one.

For the next 2 weeks I could hardly walk. I was sure that my kidneys were jarred loose. My brother supported me in walking and did everything possible to make me comfortable and make it easier on me. Sometimes he got other friends to help support or carry me. We were as close to each other as anybody could be. There was not one thing that we would not do for each other. There were several brother teams and father and son teams in the camp but almost all of them were always fighting. They would even stab each other or kill for a little piece of bread. We turned into animals. You had to put in a hard days' work with very little food, completely undernourished. Many people could not see the light at the end of the tunnel and there were many suicides. I considered it many times, especially in Mauthausen and Ebensee but I did not do it because I was a coward. Also, I was worried what would happen to my brother. We were alive because of each other. We helped each other, shared everything we had and there was never a bad word between us.

Quite often you were grabbed on weekends to do specialty work called "emergency jobs". You would have to go unload wagons with coal, lumber, cleaning toilets, etc. We tried to hide and most of

the time we avoided those special weekend raids. I found a little hiding place where we could sit around and rest, not to be found for miscellaneous work. Everybody tried to preserve their strength and do as little extra as possible but if you stepped outside to get a drink of water, the Ukrainians would be waiting for you and you might be selected to do work. The Ukrainians seemed to have a hard time finding where we were hiding and this was frustrating to them. This made them even meaner.

The need for this weekend “supplementary” work was endless. You might be needed in the kitchen, in the toilets, or in the yard. You had to be careful not to surface at the wrong time. One Sunday I was grabbed with a bunch of other guys to go to the loading ramp. As soon as we got there I was assigned with one other Hungarian Jewish inmate. We were shoveling coal from a wagon. The Hungarian was a little slower than me and the guard kept yelling at him to make him work faster. Apparently, he wanted to go home. The guard kept nudging him with his rifle. Suddenly, from nowhere, the Hungarian picked up a piece of coal and threw it at the guard. The guard unleashed a salvo of gunfire at the Hungarian. The guard was

angry and it looked like he was going to shoot me too. All he did was yell at me to finish quickly. You have never seen anybody shovel like I did. I finished unloading the rest of the wagon alone in less than 10 minutes. After all of that work I had the privilege of carrying the body back to the camp, approximately 10 km. He was not so big but very heavy. I was a small undernourished kid.... no Hercules. I just barely made it back to the camp.

Every 2 or 3 guys had an individual guard. When you finished your assignment you went back to the camp with the guard. When we came back to the camp, I was scared to death. I did not know what to expect. I put the body down right near the gate. The guard told me to go back to my barracks. My brother waited outside because there was already a rumor in the camp that somebody got shot on the job site. Since he knew that I was there and he knew my behavior, he worried. When I came into the camp you could see the happiness on his face. It was a very good feeling for both of us. We had somebody to belong to and we had a common goal.... to survive and rejoin the rest of the family.

It did not take long before I got into trouble again. Normally our old guard was with us. He knew that we had little piles of potatoes buried under the ground. This day there was a new guard. I happened to wander away from the construction site into the forest. The new guard started to shoot at me with so-called German "Dum Dum" bullets until he hit me in my knee. I fell down. I managed to tear off a sleeve from my uniform and tie it around my knee to stop the bleeding. The other guard came running over and asked what happened. I showed him the potato pile and he scolded the other guard and left. That made it worse as I could see that the guard was even more nervous. That made all the more scary. I was laying in the forest several hours, at least 6 or 7, with the guard standing over me with his rifle ready to finish me off as soon as I moved. I was in terrible pain. I did not dare to move or say anything.

About 6:00 p.m. everybody was lining up to go home. That day there was a wagon with a horse that delivered supplies to the construction. Normally, there weren't such wagons but miraculously there was one that day. My brother begged the guard for permission to put me on the

wagon. He agreed and I got back to the camp hospital. There again I did not know what to expect. There were no more friends to intervene on my behalf.

A couple of days later two very elegantly dressed SS officers came and asked me what happened. "I did not try to run away," I said. I told them that I had potatoes buried and that I went to dig them up. They believed me and said they wouldn't harm me if every so often I would bring some news about the people in the camp to the SS commander. In other words, spy for them. I promised them that I would (fortunately I never had to or did). They left with a feeling of accomplishment. They had orders to take me away but somehow they decided that I might be more valuable to them in the camp than dead. I never saw them again and the SS camp commander never followed up on me. This was another big miracle.

Luckily, my life was saved again and I was taken to the camp clinic. There was a Jewish doctor who served in World War I in the Austrian army. He said that I was very lucky in many ways: 1) A dum dum bullet usually exploded into many pieces

upon impact. This one happened to be a defective bullet and it did not explode. 2) He had never seen a bullet enter between the knee bones and not damage any of them. In the meanwhile my knee accumulated water and swelled up like a balloon. The doctor took 2 horse syringes and poked into my knee to take out the water. This was without anesthesia of course. I almost fainted it was so painful. The doctor put a bandage around it and I fell asleep.

The block leader came to visit me to make sure that I was not faking. Each block leader had his favorite Jew, called a Moshek. We were his Moshek. This day, the Russian was in a good mood and he even brought me a small piece of bread. He was a big, husky Russian. I tried not to give him any excuse to harm me or my brother. We happened to get along with him very well. Many times he skipped us for weekend work.

I stayed in the hospital a few days and went back to my block. On the fourth or fifth day my brother carried me most of the way to work "piggy-back" style. We were following behind the rest of the group and we got a few nudges with the butt of

the rifle to catch up. This went on for about 2 weeks until I could stand on my foot. Some of the events that happened to me were unbelievable and I wonder how these miracles happened. I cannot figure out why I was spared and given the gift of life. Why not one of my brothers or my parents? I do not know, yet, I know that this is all the truth.

We stayed in Finfteichen concentration camp until December 31, 1944. We could hear the Russian canons, loud and clear. The last few months things got still worse. After work, we had to dig ditches for shelters. Almost every night, the guard woke up the camp. We had to run into the ditches where we spent the rest of the night. We were issued additional blankets that we were allowed to take with us into the ditches. For a few weeks we would all run to the ditches during the bombings. We did not know who was doing the bombing. We were hoping that at any moment the Russian army would liberate us. The sirens were blowing most of the night. It was a good feeling. We hoped to be liberated soon. We did get some news or rumors from the outside. Sometimes you got a hold of a flyer called I.V.O. which stands for "Jiden villen azoi" or "Jews wish it so."

Most of the rumors were wishful thinking. The Russian army was referred to as the Big Bear. Everybody was waiting for the bear to wake up from hibernation but it didn't happen. Instead, we had to line up for selection again. Some of us were to go to the parent camp Gross Rosen and some were to go on the "March". At the time of selection nobody knew anything. All we could see was that we were being split into two groups. My only concern was to remain together with my brother. We needed each other to survive.

I was separated from my brother. I started to cry and scream and it helped. We were put together again. On January 1st, 1945, at 6:00 a.m. the Germans evacuated the camp. We got our ration of bread and so-called coffee and we started marching. We marched for about 3 weeks, sometimes day and night. Who ever could not keep up was shot and left lying on the road. A couple of times we found a big barn and slept there. Occasionally we got a small amount of food, just enough to prolong our lives. Our stomachs were shriveled and it did not take much food to fill them. Our faces and feet were swollen and we received

beatings and dog bites. Thousands of people died and even the German guards were getting fed up with these marches. They obeyed to the end though, like robots. Keep in mind that these guards were relieved every few days and we were never "relieved". We were occasionally joined by additional people from different camps, Hungarians, Greeks, Dutch and Belgians.

That march was physically and mentally exhausting. Now, when I think rationally, I find those 5 years almost unbelievable. I say to myself, "How can I convince others that all this happened, when I can't understand it myself? How could anybody survive such ordeals?"

The last few days we stayed in an abandoned German military camp. We slept outside on the ground. There were still some German soldiers there. Most of them were handicapped or had been wounded at the Eastern or Western front. You could see that they were not the same enthusiastic soldiers that they were a few years earlier. I got lucky again in that I was assigned to clean the toilets and the dining room after the German soldiers. For reasons unknown to me, in the yard were laying

dead horses. Since I had access to the dining room, I took a knife and cut out pieces from the horse and we ate it raw. I also collected scrap pieces of bread and me and my brother got back on our feet. It is unbelievable that we did not get sick from this food. Most of it was diseased but we were starving and we did not care. I also found a couple of burlap sacks to put the "extra" food in. We tried to save some of it for the future. We actually felt that there was a future and never gave up.

This group that we were with consisted of Hungarian, Polish, Belgian, Dutch, and Greek Jews. We had problems mainly with the Greek people. At night in the barns when everybody was asleep they came around and bit flesh from other guys. They would bite off ears, noses, fingers, or toes. They were cannibals. In a way I am not sure that they could be blamed. We were all animals, dehumanized. Some of us were more out of control than others but we all wanted to survive. I also got into a few skirmishes with the Greeks and Russians, and even with my own people. They respected authority and as small as I was, I could make a lot of noise. My voice would somehow make them feel that I was a terror. In these situations, my brother

would back me up. We bluffed our way through many times, especially on the train and on the marches.

Finally, about the end of February 1945, we all went on the train which consisted of open top cattle wagons. This was not a scheduled train. When the track was free, we traveled. When it wasn't, we just sat on a siderail and stayed in the cold, wet and filthy car. We were approximately 70-75 people in each wagon. On our wagon there were over 70 Hungarian Jew plus me and my brother, Polish Jews. As I said before, I got lucky. Every day I picked up pieces of bread and I found a couple of sacks. My brother was guarding it. When we went on the wagons we had two sacks of bread and several pieces of horse meat. The Hungarians tried to attack us and steal the bread. I had to fight with them all of the time. I was small but I scared them with my voice. It was a question of survival. The Germans did not give us any food or water. We ate snow but this was bad in that it dried out our throats.

People died of starvation by the bunches. The train stopped in Prague and Pilsen,

Czechoslovakia. Some of the Czech workers threw their sandwiches to us on their way to work. We needed something to drink. Finally, the train arrived at Mauthausen concentration camp in Austria. That was March 5th, 1945. The wagons smelled with dead corpses and human waste. Less than 12 people got out of the train alive from our wagon. We were exhausted, hungry, half frozen, and above all, without hope. It was a horrible sight and it looked like a morgue. I don't know how the German soldiers could stand it and just didn't run away.

It was snowing all day long and all we had on us was the striped garment without underwear. We stayed in the yard, shivering, for almost 3 days. There were German dogs which roved, barked, and jumped on people who got out of the line. Almost everybody got beat up or bitten by the dogs. The Germans were completely out of control... it was unbelievable. My brother got hit with a club in his left wrist and had a bone fractured. He fell down and just did not want to get up anymore. I pleaded with him and got him to stand up. Everybody knew that this was the end. It was worse than a massacre, dead bodies laying all over. The stench was awful.

We did not get any food or drinks, and it was terribly cold. Some people were biting off pieces of flesh from the dead bodies. It was a horrible site to watch but nobody paid attention or cared.

Finally, on the 3rd day we were again loaded on trucks and shipped to another concentration camp named Ebensee in Austria. Before I was taken to the slave labor camp, my mother gave me two old Austrian gold coins. They were a little smaller than a dime and had very little commercial value. But, they were blessed by a Grand Rabbi, Reb Berish, after whom I was named. I hid them most of the time in my rectum but when we came to Ebensee, we had to go through a disinfection process. There was a large pool with a bridge on top, approximately 10' wide. We had to swim from one side to the other completely submerged. One loses complete control of his body when doing this. That is where I lost my gold coins. I was very sad because I believed that this was my lucky gold. Also, my brother was upset. Luckily, my brother did not show any anger because he did not care anymore. He could not get angry at anybody and nobody could get angry with him. He had the soul of an angel. He looked like he was already resigned to

die. We were all in the same situation but some could take a little more punishment than others.

Although Ebensee was not heaven, compared to Mauthausen it was an improvement. At least we were inside a barrack this time. In the morning we got cold coffee (black water). By that time all of our bread and meat was gone. I told the block leader that I was a blacksmith so I was assigned to work on a lathe drilling holes in cannons. The Germans dug out big holes in the mountains and put factories in these holes. These were called Stollen. My brother's job was to pick up parts and bring them to the machines. Unfortunately, he was giving up. He could not cut it any more. We were both swollen in the feet, the face, and hands and we could hardly walk anymore.

My brother had a couple of hats that he said we had no use for. There was this place, so-called market, where you could buy or trade almost anything. So we decided to go there. My brother did the negotiating. He got a piece of bread, the size of a daily ration. As we were leaving, he was attacked by a gang of Russian boys who tried to steal the bread. I could see him fight desperately for

it and I immediately jumped in to help him but we were no match for them. They stuck a knife in my buttock and I started to bleed. They got the bread and hats and took off. My brother got some paper and stopped the bleeding. The wound started to get infected and was getting bigger. Every night I squeezed out some pus but I was afraid to go to the infirmary. I would be reported to the guard that I was in a fight. I walked around like this for approximately 2 weeks. I really did not care. I could see the end. When we were liberated by the US troops I went to an army Red Cross station. By then there was a hole as big as a fist. they cleaned it out and covered it with gauze. It healed nicely and all I have now is a big scar.

This was not my big concern. Our problem was to get some food into my brother. I had to find a way to organize things and after banging my head against a stone wall for a long time I came up with an idea. I went out to the crematoria. There was a dump. I managed to steal a couple of human bones which I brought to the barrack. My brother refused to touch it. I didn't. I chewed on them whenever I got a chance. We did not know anymore the difference between right and wrong.

A few days later, by the end of April, my brother could not go to work anymore. It was up to me to make decisions. If I let him go back to work, the guard would kill him. If I let him lay in the barrack he would die before I came back from work. So I decided to take him to the infirmary. We were both hungry and worn out. The night before I took him to the infirmary I tried to earn an additional bowl of soup which consisted of a few potato peels with water. I was hoping that this would give my brother a little strength. When I got to the infirmary I was supposed to carry dead bodies to the crematoria. They threw a dead body on my back and I started to walk but my feet buckled under me. I fell with the body. A capo came out with a club and started hitting me. I finally escaped and ran back to my barracks and did not say a word to my brother. I just lay down on my bed and went to sleep. My brother slept on the bottom bunk and I on the upper. We were completely dehumanized, without hope. You could see dead bodies laying all over, in the gutters. Nobody paid any attention anymore. The German soldiers were deserting and eventually they were replaced with civilian guards. These guards didn't bother with what was going on

inside the camp. They stayed mainly in the towers and at the entrance gates.

In the morning when I saw my brother, he was hardly breathing. I took him to the infirmary hoping that he would get better and maybe get some nourishment and strength. He was almost nonresponsive when I took him there. (They would not let me in to see him until a couple of days before we were liberated by the American army.) When things began to become less strict, I tried to go see him again. As I walked along a chain link fence, I heard a very faint voice calling, "Benush, Benush". I looked around and could not believe my own eyes. He was laying on the top of a mountain of dead bodies. I started to cry and did not know what to say or do.

I ran back to the barracks told it to my friends and asked for their help. Several of us went back, pulled him down from the mountain of dead bodies, took him back to the barracks, and laid him down on his bed. He explained to us that the last couple of days the crematoria did not function anymore and that was why he was still alive. He himself did not know how it happened that he came

to be where he was. It is a mystery to us how he ended up where he did, on top of the pile, how I happened to walk by the fence, and how he was still alert enough to be able to recognize and call me. In these hellish conditions and after all that we went through, this was one of the happiest moments of my life.

By this time, all of the military guards inside and outside the camp and in the towers were gone. The only guard left was at the gate. People were running around and beating up the Capos, killing them. There were bodies all over and nobody paid attention to them anymore. The prisoners were breaking into the warehouses and grabbing what ever they could. Of course I joined the crowd and picked up some food, mainly bread. I brought it to the room and gave some nourishment to my brother. I wasn't interested in killing anybody, only in trying to help my brother and perhaps pick up some strength for myself, too. It did not take much food to make us start to feel better. I managed to get so much food that I did not have a place to put it. Some of my neighbors in my bunk were so ill that they could not get up to get it themselves. They had nobody to look out for them. I shared

our food with them. This saved our lives and maybe theirs. I knew how lucky I was to find my brother. Maybe this was my way of thanking God.

In the early morning, the day of the liberation, the guard had everybody line up again. There were about 20,000 people there. One of the newly appointed guards gave a big speech that Americans were coming to kill us all. The German government wanted to save us and we should all go into the shohlen, openings in the mountains. Rumors were circulating that the Germans mined the openings and once we were in there they would blow up the entrance of the mountain. Most of the people including myself knew about it and everybody almost in unison yelled out, "No, No!" Those guards had no more teeth to enforce anything and a short while later they were also gone. Approximately one or two o'clock in the afternoon the same day, the American tanks rolled in.

COULD IT BE REAL?

On May 7th, 1945 the American tanks drove into the camp. Nobody who was there will forget this moment. We cried for joy. I was scared and I

did not understand anything. All I saw were big tanks with huge men on them screaming and yelling. The only word that I could make out was "Okay". I did not know what it meant. I was numb, dumfounded, and very happy. I did not dare to believe that my dream was coming true. I finally composed myself. I won't forget this moment because I never thought that it would happen in my lifetime. How could I understand anything? I was disconnected from the outside world, turned into a little dumb animal. I was disappointed so many times before but finally I realized that what I was seeing was for real. When I woke up from this dreamlike state my first thought was to my brother. I was sad that he was so weak and bedridden that he had to miss this sight. I went to him and described everything to him. I told him that I would go get some help for him.

At that moment God must have given me courage. I ran over to a soldier. I did not know if he was an officer and I really did not care at this time. I motioned to him to follow me and he did. I took him to my brother. It just so happened that he was an army doctor. He immediately ordered 2 soldiers to bring a stretcher. They took him to an army

hospital I did not know where. I stayed behind completely separated from my brother. I regretted letting him out of my sight and I did not know if he was alive or not. The next morning I ran from place to place asking the whereabouts of my brother. There was no communication and nobody knew anything. I was angry at myself for making the wrong decision. But, I decided not to give up.

The next day the army came in with a field kitchen and served something called Irish stew. It was fat and greasy meat with potatoes. I did not waste any time and ate several portions. Not much later I got diarrhea very badly. I was throwing up green saliva. I thought for sure that I would die. I was completely helpless and had nobody to turn to. Suddenly I remembered my mother saying that the best thing for diarrhea was coffee grinds. I did not hesitate and went to the USA kitchen asking for coffee grinds. They thought that I was crazy to try this cure and tried to talk me out of it. Maybe they wanted to get rid of me but they gave me a full can! I ate it and believe it or not, I got better. Hundreds, perhaps thousands, of people from the camps died from diarrhea after the liberation. I sometimes wonder why the doctors did not know better than to

give such food to sick people. Was it just carelessness or was it done with malice?

It took a few days to recover from being so sick. I then resumed my mission to find my brother. I followed the Americans around and became a pest to them. No matter what their rank, all of the soldiers were extremely courteous, tolerant, patient and helpful. I finally found a Captain who spoke a broken German. He took pity on me and helped me find my brother. I learned that my brother was in Salzburg in a military hospital. I gathered all of my and my brother's meager belongings and I got a ride on a military jeep to Salzburg thanks to the same Captain. I saw my brother clean and alive. We kissed each other and somehow I could not stop crying. The first thing he said was, "As soon as I feel a little better and stronger, we will go look for our 3rd brother." We did not know his fate, that he was not among the living anymore. My oldest brother and middle brother were very close to each other at home before the war. I found out much later what happened to him but my brother never lived to find out our oldest brother's fate.

I organized for myself a couple of blankets and I got permission to sleep on the floor next to my brother's bed in the hospital. He was telling me that he went through surgery and he had skin grafted from his stomach and placed on his foot. We stayed in the hospital several days. We got to know a lot of people in the hospital. Most of them had the same problems as we did. The hospital was specially set up for survivors. There also happened to be American wounded soldiers. The staff was American and English. The service was very cordial with much tolerance and understanding. Just about everybody displayed a very happy mood. My brother and me spent most of the time together. We were overwhelmed with happiness just to have each other. The first thing we tried to do was to forget all the past and think about the future. We talked a lot and somehow did not run out of subjects. Most other people talked about going home but we had absolutely no reason. There was so much animosity towards Poland and the Polish people that we did not consider to return to Szczakowa.

In the mid-30's my brothers had contemplated to go to Israel. My parents would not

hear of it. In the middle of 1936 my father received a letter from one of his cousins in New York asking him to come to live in the U.S. It was completely disregarded by my parents. The government retired my father with a full pension. My older brother investigated and told my father that he would not lose his pension and that the Polish government would transfer the money to the USA. As I mentioned previously, my father had all kinds of citations, awards, and commendations from the Polish government and from the Polish President personally. One of them stated that he would have priority for any of his children to get a position in the Polish government. He had 39 years of service to the Polish government and was forced to retire by law as he was over 60 years of age. His dream was to have his sons work for the Polish government. His dream turned into a nightmare. Now that I look back on it, I see that he had the same problem as the rest of the 3 million Jews in Poland. They could not see the handwriting on the wall.

Before my middle brother left Szczakowa he made a huge wooden box. He put all of our expensive items in it like fur coats, silver, and gold, and nailed it down and gave it to one of our gentile

neighbors. We were very good friends with them and thought that they would keep it safe. This was in May 1942. Later on, when it got cold, my brother came back from Chrzanow to Szczakowa to pick up a warm coat. Our "good" neighbor threw my brother out and told him that if he came back one more time they would call the Gestapo. My brother, being a soft easy-going fellow, left. He was smart enough to know that there was nothing he could do except get himself into trouble. It later became obvious that the Polish people waited for such an occasion. In my opinion, they contributed more to the Holocaust than the Germans did.

After the liberation my brother and me consulted with each other about our future. We had visitors from the Jewish agencies asking for volunteers to go to Palestine. My brother decided that we should sign up. After all, he and my oldest brother had planned to go to Palestine before the war but our parents objected. Jancie's theory was that very possibly our older brother would try to fulfill this dream and we would meet there. His whole life's goal was to find Chaim Moishe alive. They were less than a year apart and very close to

each other. They grew up like one. So, we signed up to go to Palestine.

My brother was getting better and stronger. I brought in special food from the outside and from the hospital kitchen where I made friends with the cooks. I was very good at this. We would share some of this with our new friends. My brother could not eat unless he shared some of it. Most of the patients did not have anybody who could help them. We were very happy that we could help and my brother was proud of what I did.

I looked after him with every possible means that I could. He was to me my brother, my father, and my guide. He was very smart and an extremely nice person. He was 10 years older than me but it did not matter. We had great love and respect for each other. We also treated each other as equals and were absolutely inseparable.

Well, a couple of weeks later we were off to a new land and a new world. We were picked up by Jewish soldiers who were in the English army, with English military trucks. We were traveling from Austria to Italy. We stopped in Bologna where we

were given big camel hair blankets. For the next couple of nights we slept in the park. It was very warm and it was a lot of fun and an adventure. We were looking forward to the new life and nothing scared us. We planned what we would do to make a living. My brother insisted that I go back to school and catch up with what I missed. I did not argue with him. In fact, we never argued about anything. He was right most of the time. He was older and smarter. I was more daring which very possibly saved our lives. Together, we were a great team.

From Bologna we were transported to Modena into a transit camp and waited for a ship. We did not know how long we would have to wait. A few guys got together and we decided to go to Rome and Napoli, maybe we would be able to earn some money. My brother decided not to come along and with his blessing I went alone. It took us a few days to get to Rome by freight train, boat, trucks, and pontoons. The Italian people were extremely friendly to us. They hated the Germans and would do anything for us at this point. We rode on a freight train with a lot of young Italians from the South. They gave us white bread and sang with us. We also had a bunch of brown-robed

Jesuits. We discussed religion with them and they answered like automatons. There was a major river that we had to cross, the River Po. The bridges were bombed out, but we eventually crossed it and got to Rome. It was exciting and we were not afraid to show our Jewishness in these travels. When we got to Rome, the Jesuits took us to the Vatican. We stayed there several nights and got food and special food, blankets, even wine and a bunk to sleep on. This was also the only place that one could find a kippah!

About this time, the Vatican was having a promotion. If you converted, you would get 300 lira, about \$12.00. So, we converted and a few hours later came back to a different clerk with a different name and converted again. Another promotion going was that you got 450 lira if you got married in the church. This was not too difficult. We just went outside the Vatican and found many "night females" who, for a small fee, would come and marry you. You also received clothes, shoes, and blankets which we sold in the black market. In this way I earned several hundred dollars American money and I was satisfied. I was worried about my brother so I decided to go back to Modena where

my brother was waiting for me. Before I left he was feeling fine and he told me not to worry about him. But I forgot how fragile he was. All in all, I was away a little less than 2 weeks.

This turned out to be too long. There was no way to communicate and we needed some money badly. I was the only one who could get it as my brother was too fragile to come along. When I came back to Modena my brother was not there anymore. I was told that he was in the hospital. I went to the hospital and found him in bed. Apparently, he suffered a minor heart attack complicated by kidney trouble. He could not urinate and his lungs were damaged. I spoke to the doctors and they said they could not operate until he got better, that his heart would not endure any operation. We were hoping that he would get better. Instead things were getting worse. I went quickly to Milano and met with the president of the Jewish community to see if I could get any help. They called the hospital and the doctor told them that my brother should not be moved. He had to stay in bed for a while until the doctors would determine that he is fit for any needed operation. I stayed with him, by his bedside, and talked to him.

I tried to humor him and told him about my adventures to Rome. he was happy. I tried to take his mind off of his sickness but there was little else that I could do. Of course, we had to postpone any further traveling.

But he did not get better, only worse. He started to spit blood from his lungs. He never came out from the hospital. He knew that he was dying. He kept begging me, "Benush, don't let me die." And I kept promising him that I wouldn't. But, I did not keep my word. He died February 28, 1946. It was a terrible loss to me. I was completely broken, just like I lost both of my arms and my head. I almost committed suicide. I was going to jump out of the hospital window. Two nuns grabbed me, sat me down, gave me a couple of pills and I fell asleep. When I woke up I went to the Chief doctor to make sure that they would not do an autopsy as Jewish law forbade it. The Rabbi in Modena happened to be one of the nicest people you ever met. His name was Rabbi Dr. Rafael Lattes. He took care of the funeral. The whole Jewish committee and community participated in the funeral which consisted mostly of survivors from the Holocaust. I became completely disoriented. I did not know

where to go or what to do. I was terribly lonely and I felt like I was being punished again, I did not know for what.

I was not used to being alone and making decisions for myself. I didn't see any future in Modena so I went to Milano where I figured there would be a bigger Jewish community. I spent Passover with the Jewish Palestine Brigade. They gave me the honor at the Seder to say the 4 questions. I ate in the commissary with the soldiers and little by little I was getting normalized. I joined the Brigade for a while. The Brigade, which fought under the English flag, became discharged and sent to Egypt. I did not want to go to Egypt so I remained in Milano. Right then and there I decided to live in Milano.

During this time, I found a couple who used to live in Szczakowa with their parents in the early 30's. They had emigrated to Paris and suddenly surfaced in Milano. Their parents and my parents were once friends. We socialized with them and became friends. Their name was Mr. and Mrs. Weiss. This was one nice chapter during this part of my stay. Other chapters were not so nice. I rented a

room and I did the same thing that everybody else did: I joined the BBC, the Black Business Corporation.

Trouble followed me everywhere. I got involved with people that I should not have. I started to drink. We sometimes used the English army trucks and went to Switzerland. My partner was a Sephardic Jew from Yugoslavia. We picked up Penicillin and some cigarettes and sold them in Milano. On one deal I invested everything I had and would have made a bundle, about \$50,000.00 but we were caught by the British military police when we crossed the border with Italy. this broke me completely. I tried all kinds of ways to make money and recuperate.

During this time I also made a couple of trips to Budapest, Hungary. We carried counterfeit English pounds. This money was being printed in Italy on special thin paper, like cigarette paper. This money was being used by the Hungarian government to pay their war debts and we sold it to them at a hefty profit. Eventually, the Hungarian government found that it was counterfeit and stopped these transactions.

My social life wasn't too bad. I met a couple of girls and enjoyed dating. But, it turned out that they wanted to get married. One wanted to go to Australia and the other to Brazil. Both wanted me to go with them, but I decided to pass. I was lost and lonely and I didn't know what my future would bring, but marriage was the last thing that I wanted at this time.

One day I was standing on Via Izatore in Milano. That was where most of the Jews conducted black market business. I saw this young lady and recognized her to be Regina Meister, the sister of our famous camp leader Mr. Baruch Meister. She told me that she had a small apartment nearby and that she lived with her brother Baruch. I told her how nice he was to me and my brother and how he saved my life a couple of times. I wanted to see her brother very much and convey to him my thanks and my appreciation. She agreed to take me home with her to see her brother. She said that he would be happy to see me as most other people were chasing after him to kill him. We headed for her apartment and apparently he heard our voices. He got scared and as we went through the door we saw

him jumping through the window to escape. His sister told me that this is not the first time such a thing happened and he was afraid of his shadow. Sadly, I never saw either one of them again.

In the meantime I found out about my oldest brother Chaim Moshe. I was told that he was killed when the Germans occupied Eastern Poland. Apparently, he had made the wrong decision and did not run away. He was captured by the Germans and put into concentration camp. He got sick and was made to dig his own hole. They shot him and he fell in the hole.

Somehow I did not like this kind of life that I was living now. I was not brought up this way. I was a young man with no guidance and I did not do so well in Milano. One day I decided to leave Italy, to go back to Germany. I had several reasons. I was hoping to find some cousins or uncles especially from my mother's side. I joined a group that took us over the Austrian mountains to Innsbruck. There I registered into a camp for Jewish refugees. I made friends with this lady and her daughter Marsha. She was not bad looking, a little older than me but much more mature than me. We went out a few times but

basically I just hung around. They made me feel especially at home. She offered to pick up my daily rations from the commissary and in return I ate dinner with them. I did not keep score of what she picked up or what she did with it because I did not figure to be there very long.

I stayed there approximately 3 weeks and here is what led up to my leaving: One evening we were having dinner and the mother showed me a whole closet full of wine. She said, "Your wine is here too. I am saving it for you and Marsha's wedding!" I did not say a thing. But, the next morning very early, I picked up my few belongings and hitchhiked to Germany. I was definitely not ready for marriage to anybody.

I ended up in Munich. I still had a few dollars in my pocket. Again, I registered in a camp as a refugee where I stayed a few days. That is where I met Eva and her brother Selig. I made friends with her brother but I did not pay much attention to Eva. She looked like a 12 year old little girl. Selig and I did some business together. I made some connections with Italian smugglers. They would bring in goods from Italy like socks,

underwear, etc. I was the middle man, their agent. I had the connections to sell and spoke their language. I also was involved in other things like making French cognac and selling it to the black GIs who were stationed on the outskirts of Munich. I had my fingers in many things, wherever I could make some money. It was very important to me to be independent and free.

I even had a bodyguard, a big Russian officer. We were very good friends. One time we went to Mehlstrasse in Munich which was the headquarters of the Black Market. Anything could be found there to buy or to sell. Suddenly I saw a man there who was a Capo in Grosse Masselwitz with me. One time he had given me a beating for not making my bed properly. I yelled out to my Russian friend and pointed out the Capo. My Russian friend was a big man and he started to join me in beating the Capo. Suddenly a big crowd gathered and almost everybody was hitting him until the police came and took him away with an ambulance. When the Police came to make a report I told them my story. They asked the Russian why he beat the guy and he answered that it was only because I was his best friend and I told him to.

Soon I rented a room. I was very fortunate to be able to make all kinds of connections. I was getting established. I made connections in the Munich City Hall and worked with the Breicha and the Hagana whenever they had some refugees left over that needed to be legalized. I gave the clerks several cartons of American cigarettes and some of my own homemade cognac. They all jumped when I came in. Sometimes I came in with as much as 12-15 survivors. The whole city hall stopped and everybody would start filling out applications. The applications were for so-called Kencarte, an identification card. If they went out, the police wouldn't pick them up. I received a small commission which served as supplemental income.

I made some friends among the female sect. I got involved with a girl. She insisted on getting married and going to Australia. I was still not ready. Then I hooked up with a red headed girl. We were going together for some time. Eventually, they all wanted to get married. They all happened to be very nice girls. Maybe I just was not ready. I am sorry to say and admit that I walked out on all of them.

One day about 9 months later I was walking on the street in Munich and I saw a young very beautiful girl standing on the corner waiting for a bus. Something came over me. I immediately crossed the street and started a conversation. I did not recognize at all that this was Selig's sister. She had blossomed into a beautiful young lady. Of course I apologized and escorted her home. She was not the same little schoolgirl anymore. Something came over me that completely changed the inside of me. She really was different and I felt different inside when I was with her. I met her parents and somehow felt like I was at home.

Sometimes things happen that are unexplainable. She became to me like a magnet. We made a date. Unfortunately, I could not keep it. At that time I had to go to the hospital for a liver observation. There were no telephones to communicate. I felt very badly that I might have lost her because I stood her up. But there was nothing I could do. The next morning a miracle happened... I took a look and what do I see in the doorway? Eva was there! She found me, like a miracle. She also brought me a can of American

peaches. After that we were not separated. After a while we started to plan our own future. She wanted to go to the U.S.A. and I wanted to go wherever she wanted to go. By the way, I still do. It became obvious that we more than liked each other and I felt that I would spend the rest of my life with her. We talked for hours and seemed to agree on everything. Her mother seemed to like me but her brother, Zelig, remained neutral.

Zelig was the leader of the family. Everybody looked up to him. He was also the main provider. Zelig was afraid that I would not settle down and he just did not trust me. One time we went to the mountains for a whole day. Zelig was standing at the ticket window when we were about to go onto the train. Eventually, I did convince him that I would act honorably and he did not come with us.

We decided to register under the Truman Displaced Persons Act. We could not though because we were not married. The next day I talked to my friend Haskel. He drove a car for the Jewish Committee. Without any delay he picked up a few of my friends, we picked up Eva and he took us to

the German City Hall (Standesamt). We took out a marriage license, went to a judge, got married, and got a piece of paper that said so. We went back to the American consul, where a good friend of mine from Szczakowa worked. There we registered to go to the U.S.A.

Eva's mother did not know a thing about it. Neither one of us knew how to break it to her. The next day I talked to one of my friends who was my brother's age asking him to talk to Eva's mother and tell her that I wanted to marry her daughter. He said, "No! I don't want to get involved!" That evening I came to pick up Eva to go out. Her mother opened up the door, greeted me very nicely and right there standing at the door she said, "I already set the date for you and Eve's wedding." We were both standing with our mouths open obviously very happy. Neither one of us expected this! It was obvious to her mother that we were in love with each other. The following Friday night I was invited for dinner. Mother gave me a present, a gold pocket watch that her husband gave her when he came back from World War I. Things could not be better. We were two naive kids in love with each other with our future waiting for us. In less than 6

weeks we got our permits to go to the U.S.A. Things were moving too fast and I had to liquidate my business assets. Zelig helped with the wedding arrangements. This freed me to prepare for the big journey. Brother Zelig was a very special and extremely nice person.

Things were moving *too* fast now. We had to postpone our travel. We got married with a Rabbi and had a very nice wedding. We also had to get married at the American Consul. We got married a total of 3 times. After the real wedding Eva came to live with me. I had a one room place but it was enough. Neither one of us had any complaints.

However, our German landlady was not crazy about us. Her husband was an ex-Nazi who used to play music in the German Officer's club. When Eva would cook, the entire place smelled from onions and garlic. Before I got married, my landlady loved me like a son. But afterwards, she was very unhappy. She couldn't wait to get rid of us. She went around banging doors and doing what she thought might get rid of us. None of that bothered us and this made the landlady even

angrier. We stayed out of her way as much as possible.

THE GOLDENE MEDINA

Less than 2 weeks after the real wedding we left to Bremen harbor. There we waited in a transit camp for one week. It was not exactly what one would call a honeymoon. Finally, we got on the boat, the S.S. General Balou. We were separated from each other because men were on one end of the boat and women on the other end. We did get to see each other on the deck during the daytime. We happened to run into a very severe storm. This boat was a military transport ship and we slept in hammocks, suspended from the ceiling, that swung back and forth. For 7 or 8 days I was constantly and terribly seasick, and it was worse at night. I could not hold my food down. I kept running to the infirmary which was down in the basement. At one time I was coming up to the deck and a young man walked by the door just as I was coming out. I vomited all over him. I wanted to apologize to him but he took off like lightening. It looked like he was afraid he would get another load.

I made friends with the crew down in the kitchen. They knew that I could not eat regular food so they gave me all kinds of fruits, chocolate, cake. I took all of this to my new bride. For me, the voyage was horrible but we survived and this too passed. I was very happy knowing that my new wife was very happy with my delivery of goods. When I was not sick or running to the toilet, we spent every moment together. We did not run out of things to talk about.

The last night on the ship was beautiful, so romantic. The storm was over and the sea was smooth as glass. I showered and dressed with all clean clothes. It felt like being reborn. I threw out all of the smelly clothes and we just stayed on the deck most of the night until early morning. Of course, we saw the Statue of Liberty. Later, we had breakfast and we arrived in New York harbor. We were waiting for our baggage and we went in to a coffee shop and ordered 2 rolls with American cheese. It came with green lettuce. The first thing we did was to take out the lettuce because to us it was food for animals. We were sitting and eating when a man went by and said to us, "You are brand new refugees from Europe." I asked him how he

knew and he said that when he first came to the US he did the same thing to his sandwich. I told him that we were going on to Los Angeles. He told us not to go there because it wasn't developed yet. He said, "You would be better to go to Africa!" We did not listen to his advice.

Eva's uncle was waiting for us with a picture from our wedding. Mr. Aaron Nussenfeld, my wife's father's oldest brother, was a very elderly gentleman and exceptionally nice. He had Parkinson's disease and was shaking badly. Eva also had an aunt in New York. Her mother's brother was supposedly very rich. His name was Mr. Goldsmith and he owned several department stores called "Goldsmith's" all over New York. We thought it would be nice to pay our respects and bring greetings from his sister. This was a mistake. Eva went to pay her respects to her aunt. She called her on the phone and introduced herself. The aunt was very happy and she said, "Since I am very busy, you will have to be satisfied if I kiss you over the phone." She did not invite us or ask us if we needed anything. Where we came from, this would be customary. The fact was that we did not need any

financial help but we could use some good advice and moral support.

Eva came back very disappointed with tears in her eyes. This was the first time that she was separated from her mother. Her mother was sickly and Eva felt very guilty and alone. I tried to calm her down. I told her that we had two tickets to Los Angeles and that we should go. If we did not like it, we could always come back to New York to our relatives and friends. I was not in the mood for begging or kissing anybody's behind. It looked to me that they were not very eager to become friends with us. Eva's mother had written to them and they knew we were coming but they did not come to meet us. Since they chose to ignore us, I thought that we should ignore them. We decided to explore our possibilities first. If we failed, then we would bow to them. Later, when they found out that we did not need financial help, they wrote to us. They apologized but this time we were too busy for *them*. We did not answer and they called Mr. Nussenfeld to intervene. We explained to him our actions and he agreed with us.

It took us 3 nights and 4 days to get to Los Angeles by train. We arrived on October 9, 1949. It was the most beautiful summer we ever saw. I said to Eva, "I don't care if I only eat once a day, I will not move form LA.. under any circumstances. The Jewish Family Service took us to a hotel in Boyle Heights and the owner showed us the room. He turned on the light switch and said, "Did you see a miracle? You give a kvetch in the wall and the light goes on." I told him, "I come from Europe, not from Africa. Even in Poland we had electricity since before I was born in the 1920's!"

We had a nice room and in the basement there was a common kitchen. The women did not get along so well. At one point one of the husbands mixed in and pushed my wife away. The next day I went down and watched from far. The man came down with his wife and immediately pushed my wife again. I could not stand by and see my wife being pushed around by some moron. I jumped down the stairs, grabbed him and beat the hell out of him. He never showed up in the kitchen again. We were very anxious after this to get out of the hotel and find a place with privacy.

We tried to settle down and get adjusted. The next day I went out on Brooklyn Ave. and met different people. We talked about various subjects. For several days I kept making acquaintances and strolled on Brooklyn Ave. in Boyle Heights. One day I ran into Harry Cooperman who told me that he was a sheet metal man from the old country. He was born in Radom. I told him that I also was a sheet metal worker. He said to come to his place of work and he would introduce me to his boss. At this shop it became obvious to the boss that I did not know anything about sheet metal but the owner said that I looked like a man with talent. He would like to train me and he offered me a job at 80¢ an hour. I told him that I had a wife to support and that it was not enough. I tried to bargain for a few more pennies but I had to take it as is! We found a room in the back of a house. It had furniture and suited us very well.

The owner of the shop told me how fortunate I was to get a job with such a big wage. When he came to the US in the late 20's he earned enough barely to buy a loaf of bread and a tail piece of a herring. After 10 months he gave me a dime raise. He figured that I was worth training. I

worked for him almost one year. The Union insisted that I be rotated to a different shop and I did not care because I would immediately make \$2.20 an hour. The main thing is that we were happy. We really did not care how poor we were. We had enough food and a roof over our heads. Occasionally I had enough money left over to buy for my wife shoes and a dress. She was satisfied and made no demands. We had many things in common. On Sundays Eva made a batch of hamburgers and some pickles and we went to the park. We played ball, soccer, met people and made some new friends.

I remember our first Thanksgiving holiday. Everybody was making a big deal about turkey and we could not afford to buy turkey. Eva got 2 lamb chops instead. We ate and went to see a movie. That was the most beautiful Thanksgiving holiday for us. We were very appreciative and figured that whatever we got was more than what we had before.

We met this family named Greenspan. We brought greetings from Munich from his nephew, my friend. They were exceptionally nice to us. He drove us around the city and invited us to dinner

many times. He took me to look for a job and one evening he called to see how we were. I told him that I got a job in a "shit metal shop". He laughed and politely said, " You do not say 'Shit Metal', you say 'sheet metal shop'". I was very lucky to get a job he said as there was a recession and a lot of military people returning from World War II were also looking for jobs at this time. They were supposed to have priority.

I had been on at least a dozen different interviews. I struck out on all of them. I even applied with the Jewish newspaper called The Forward. I had written poetry in Yiddish at one time. I was told that my English was not good enough. Another interview was at the Jewish Federation. The interviewer asked me if I would like to speak English or Yiddish during the interview and I was very proud of my English. After half and hour of struggling in English, the interview was over and me and my wife left. I asked Eva, "Well, how do you think I did?" She said, "Perfect, I didn't understand a thing!" This has since become a family joke.

Nothing bothered me, as long as my wife was happy. Eva was very much attached to her mother whom she left in Munich, Germany. If she did not get a letter from her mother on time she would cry. That was a big problem for both of us to cope with. As soon as we came to America I tried to get the papers to bring her over and we signed warrantees that we would support her. Eventually we succeeded. By that time we lived on Normandie and 20th Street. We had a 1 bedroom bungalow which meant room for everybody including Eva's mother. This made my wife very happy.

After some time working for Weiss Sheet Metal Shop I tried to get into the Sheet Metal Union Local 108 but I could not. I was told by the agent to go back where I came from. This upset me very much. I went to the Jewish Federation, the Anti-Defamation League. I told the officer what happened and he made several phone calls. He told me to go back and that it would be all right. I went back and this time a different business agent talked to me. He said that he would enroll me under a special apprentice program with a 2 year probation period. I would have to go to a night school to learn sheet metal layout, design, and drafting. Then, I

would have to take my journeyman's exam. If I passed, I would be enrolled into Union 108 as a full-fledged journeyman. If I would not pass I would be out. I agreed and enrolled into the Frank Wigger Technical College. I went 4 times per week from 6:30 p.m. to 10:30 p.m.. I worked from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and in total I left the house at 6:00 a.m. and returned at 11:30 p.m. Things were rough but I liked the climate and I did not care how miserable I was... things surely would improve. I did not give up in the concentration camp so I would surely not give up here.

A few times I had to go to Cedars hospital for some tests. I had developed headaches. Once we had to wait so we went to the drug store and ordered 2 hot dogs. They came with mayonnaise on the side. We thought it was sour cream so we sent it back, paid and walked out. Like I said before, we were naive and green. Most things were new and unfamiliar to us. Even the good things were hard to get used to. With all these innovations, life was getting more interesting and more complicated. Meanwhile, all kinds of test came back negative and no explanation for the headaches could be found. My wife thought about it and realized that I was

getting up at 5:00 A.M. and not eating until noontime. She started to wake up early too and gave me breakfast. My headaches went away!

I had no car and had to depend on public transportation. I lived in East LA.. and worked in West Los Angeles at Weiss Sheet Metal Co. Things improved slowly and I got a nice raise. I bought a used car. Through Union Local 108 I got a new job and left Weiss Sheet Metal. I got a substantial raise as well. But, not everything was rosy.

I was not doing so well in school. I had a language problem. The teacher was called "Speedy" because he was so fast. He would go to the blackboard and write so fast that I could not keep up. I had not yet mastered the language. The teacher was under the impression that if he understood what he said, so did everybody else. Well, I did not, at least in the beginning. Other boys apparently did not understand well either and just flunked out. I did not have this luxury and had to rough it out!

There were 2 classes of "sheet metal layout and design". The other teacher was a shop foreman

at the shop where I worked so I talked to him asking his advice. He happened to be an especially nice person. He said, "Bernie, after school come to my class and I will help you each day for about a half an hour. You will need to improve your English skills and learn our terminology especially that related to design and layout." My mother once told me that if you persevere long enough, sooner or later you will succeed. She was a smart lady and this, like her other pearls of wisdom, was correct.

And so it was that for about 6 months I went to his class after I finished my regular class. By that time I improved my English and things were moving in a positive direction. I managed to take my journeyman's test in 2 years even with an 83% average. This was better than American boys with high school educations. This did not come easy. I studied weekends putting in 12-15 hours daily, almost 7 days per week. Some of my friends who were working half the hours for twice the money thought that I was crazy. They would go to the beach and I would stay home and study and draw. But, I wanted an education and I knew that this was the way for me to get ahead. My parents always wanted me to be educated and my middle brother

insisted that after we settled down, I would get one. I did not want to work with hammer and scissors for the rest of my life.

I was very proud of my progress in school. I also received a couple of awards. One was for layout of a 5 piece 90° elbow. One was for layout of a center transition square to rectangle in the shortest time. I believe in doing everything in the shortest amount of time without cutting quality. I believe in innovation and not becoming stagnant. With the years I became a thinking man.

Then, a new struggle started. I could not hold on to a job. I was too slow for a journeyman and too highly paid for an apprentice. Of course, this was the 1st year. After that I had no problem. In fact, I was getting \$.50 above union scale. I worked for about 7 1/2 years for Crescent Metal and became shop foreman making \$5.50 per hour. I also started to get involved in real estate. We moved into our own duplex. I managed to buy and sell a couple of apartment houses which made a sizable profit.

I have to give credit to my devoted wife. She was and is a gem. We had a son after seven years of marriage and named him after my father and middle brother, Melech Yaakov. We celebrated the brit and pidyon haben and Eva prepared a beautiful meal for our guest complete with tongue and corned beef. Three years later we got a dividend. We had a daughter and named her after my mother and Eva's mother, Gitel Blimah. The children brought us luck and we played with them like they were our special toys. Eva took care of the kids, the house, and the money. She was never demanding and she was always satisfied with whatever we had. We didn't have to live with a budget because Eva knew and still does know how to handle money conservatively.

Life does not stand still and it does not wait for you. My children were growing up and we had to start looking for a school for them. I insisted that they have a double education, secular and Jewish. This is the education that my parents stressed when I was growing up and I attempted to follow in their footsteps. I tried to send them to Hillel Hebrew Academy but I didn't have enough money. I appealed to the Rabbi of the school and to the Rabbi

of my synagogue and even brought my income tax returns but they would not help me. We sent the children to the local public school. In the afternoons, my wife took them to Judea Temple to get some Hebrew education three times per week. As soon as we could afford it, we transferred the children to Hillel. My wife was still very upset at how we were treated but we had to do what was best for the children, not what was best for our ego.

Professionally, I was starting to get restless and wanted to go into my own business. It just happened that a friend of ours was looking for a partner to join him in his liquor store. We had most of the details worked out. For some reason Eva did not like it. I myself hesitated especially considering the long hours and working 7 days a week, something that I was not used to anymore. I did not want to become a stranger to my children. First, the financial improvement was not that great and second, I was more interested to work with my brains and brawn, and do a little thinking. I enjoyed seeing a finished product and got pride of accomplishment. I kept looking for something better and more interesting. I was confident that I could progress to a high level. First of all I knew the

trade and I had a premonition that some day I would surface and show my talent. I knew that all I needed was the opportunity.

During that time a man called up and said that he had a sheet metal shop for sale that made kitchen equipment. I called a friend of mine whom I knew from the concentration camp. We came here to the USA together. I also went to Frank Wigger School together with him. I told him about the shop and he liked the idea. We went to take a look and decided to go for it. It meant a new struggle. That was in 1960. It was a small place, approximately 1,100 square feet with a 10' power shear and a 10' hand brake. It was a poor and small start but it *was* a start. It was up to me to grow. Since I was very good at making new friends, I went out to restaurant supply houses and made connections. Things slowly started to roll. We were both top journeymen and we both knew the trade but we needed perseverance.

I was told that I was crazy, that I had a good position, making a top scale in wages. My mother told me "You should always listen to everybody's opinion but most of the time follow your own". So I did just that. I was with my partner for over 7 years

before we parted ways. We became the new boys in town and the dealers started to like us. At that time, south Los Angeles Street was the capital of restaurant supply business. We received good support from Los Angeles Street but started to make other connections out of town and out of state.

I brought in a good size underbar job and me and my partner priced it so low that the customer could not refuse us. For about 3-4 weeks we worked 7 days a week 14-15 hours per day. When we finished the job we averaged about \$.35 per hour. We both agreed that it was worth it and we made contacts through this job. Word soon spread that we were good craftsmen and could deliver on our promises.

We really struggled. For 6 months we did not take any salary. My partner and me went out to hustle customers. Once he came back with a \$3,000.00 order and we danced a hora. The next day I called up one of my friends, also a restaurant supply dealer, and he started to laugh when I told him about the order. He said that he was surprised that we didn't get a \$10,000.00 order from that customer. "Why? Is there something wrong with

the order?" I asked. He told me that that dealer had just declared bankruptcy!! I went the next day to the customer and asked for a 50% deposit and the rest C.O.D. He threw me out and called me names because I checked his credit. It thought that the best thing to do was to ignore him and leave.

At the small 1,100 square foot place we stayed only a year and then moved to a much bigger place on 29th and San Pedro Street. For the next 6 months we took \$75.00 each per week. Slowly this changed but not to my satisfaction. I knew that I could do better. Unfortunately, we were next to a school and they needed the space. So, the City of L.A. came in and condemned our place by eminent domain. That was in 1968 and right after the riots in Watts. Property values plummeted in the area. Me and my partner also had some disagreements so we decided to go our separate ways. It was very hard for me. He was very conservative. I wanted to grow and expand. I was doing the buying of the materials and he always complained that I bought too much. We each got \$83,000 for the property and machinery and separated.

I leased a 12,000 square foot place on 15th St. and Wall St. I set up a new shop again and it was not easy. But, I grew very fast. Eventually, expanded to 39,000 square feet at that location. Again, my wife stepped in and she became a tremendous help. She took care of the office with another girl, which allowed me the freedom to run the shop full time. We did more business in one month than I did in a year with my partner. I kept diversifying into custom equipment as well as stock items out of a catalog. I was the first one in this industry to issue a catalog on the West Coast. I designed it myself, wrote the details, explanations and price list. Before I issued it, I went to a company of restaurant supplies and asked the main salesman what he thought of it. He responded, "I read it. I think it is very good and simple for any salesman to be able to use it. Except for one thing.. see if you can take out the Hebrew accent." I thought for a while and I decided who could take the Hebrew accent out better than my own son, Mel? We talked it over and he said that he would be happy to do it. He fixed the English and I issued a new catalog every year or two after that. We improved the catalog and put in new price lists, new

items, and additional pieces of equipment. We employed close to 40 employees.

I developed a new line of underbar equipment which could not be copied. My name and reputation preceded me. I had good quality, good service, and above all, the right price. I kept my men busy all year round. I kept changing and improving my line. I issued new catalogs with new and updated pictures and details of how it was manufactured. We started shipping our equipment to all the Western states. I received a plaque from the NSF for my underbar equipment as the best in the country. I was invited to speak at many locations about my equipment.

I did well financially and diversified into real estate and construction. I was importing stainless steel metal from Japan. But there have been problems also. The Union did not appreciate my success and tried to put me out of business. They conspired with one of my competitors, which happened to be my ex-employee. He would have inherited my accounts and joined the Union if I was put out of business. Several ex-employees claimed that they were fired for Union activities which we

proved was not true. Even so, the Union was financed by the government and I had no financial help. We wrote to every government official that we could but not one response came back. The judge wrote in her summary that industrialists, in her opinion, usually are liars, and therefore, she rules against us. So, my crime was being an industrialist. I had no problem paying union wages or benefits but I could not live with being told what to do and losing my freedom. I offered the Union to buy me out but they laughed at me. They said that sooner or later they would get me. They sent flyers calling me "Godfather" and "Big Uncle Ben". It was hard and I stood to lose everything.

Finally I got a break when one of my current employees stepped forward and testified that the Union conspired against me. After we had all the proof, we filed a multi-million dollar antitrust suit against the Union. It took many years to settle but eventually I prevailed. The settlement was that I would drop the antitrust suit and in return the Union would recognize me as a Union shop with all the Union privileges, but without joining the Union. This would go for ten years: I agreed. All I really wanted was to get them off my back. We had new,

free elections supervised by the labor board, the Union, and one of my employees. But for some abstentions, we won 28-2 ! I do not think that either me or my wife would want a victory like this, it was so unpleasant. But, I had no choice as it was a question of my survival. This was probably one of the hardest ordeals that my wife and I endured since coming to the U.S. At one point she was begging me to close the shop and get a job.

I just could not walk away and abandon all that I had worked so hard to build. The factory was my pride and joy. It was the fulfillment of many dreams. Financially, there were rewards. I had glory and prestige as well. I was even appointed to serve as a consultant on the Heating and Ventilation code but I refused that offer. Eventually, I persuaded my son to join me. We remodeled the shop. Unfortunately, a few months later we had a major fire. Supposedly there were some loose electrical wires. We survived this and rebuilt all of it. Just as much as I liked this industry, my son disliked it. He decided to quit. He worked with me for over 2 1/2 years. I realized that he had to be happy in what he was doing. So, I did not pressure him one way or the other.

As I became more prosperous, I started to share some of my profits with different needy institutions. I decided to perpetuate my parents' and brothers' names mainly in places where children and adults are being educated. I became a co-founder of the Simon Weisenthal Center where the dining room at the Yeshiva is named after my parents. Many Jewish schools in L.A. have kitchens donated by me in memory of my parents and brothers. In 1986 I was honored "man of the year" by Chabad. Approximately 1,000 people came in me and my wife's honor.

My son is a highly educated young man with an advanced engineering degree. He has a nice wife and 2 wonderful children. My daughter is also educated with a Doctor of Dentistry degree. She has a nice husband and one daughter. Neither of my children were really interested in my business. Me and my wife continued to operate the factory until I got sick. I was diagnosed with a brain tumor. I was operated on at UCLA hospital and thank the Lord, the tumor was benign. But, that put me in a bit of panic. In 1990 I sold the factory. I tried to stay with the new owner but the terms were not

favorable to me so I left. I had enough going for myself that I would not get bored. I design restaurants and do some construction as well as manage my real estate.

I am very proud of my accomplishments. Whenever I stop and think about the concentration camp I remember how I prayed to God for only one wish; that some day I would be a free man and I would be able to sit at a table and finish eating a whole rye bread with nothing on it or in it. Thank the Lord that has become more than a dream. It is a reality. I do think that my greatest accomplishment in my life is that I picked the right wife and together we raised the most wonderful children one could hope for. We have the added bonus of seeing them married and also of seeing 3 grandchildren. This is something that for sure I did not expect to happen. I also thank the Lord for granting me luck and protecting me from evils. I compare my fate to our father Jacob who when he first saw his son Joseph again he blessed him and said, "to see your face I did not expect, but God gave me even more. He showed me your children also." For this I thank the Lord day and night and I will never forget.

THE END

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